

SD 9: Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta (D 16)

Sutta Discovery 9 2004d, 3rd ed 2008

Translations, essays and notes by Piya Tan ©2008

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The Sutta Contents

Chapter 1

(Bareau 1) Rājagaha

1. [§1.1] **Mt Vulture Peak**, Rājagaha, about a year before the Buddha's parinirvana. The rajah **Ajāta,sattu** of Magadha plans to conquer the Vajjī confederacy.
2. [§§1.2-3] Ajātasattu sends his chief minister, the brahmin **Vassakāra**, to consult the Buddha.
3. [§§1.4-5] The Buddha speaks on **the 7 conditions for a nation's welfare**.
4. [§§1.6-11] The Buddha addresses the monks on **the 7 conditions for the welfare of the spiritual community** [§1.6], the 7 good qualities, the 7 awakening-factors, the 7 perceptions, the 6 memorable qualities.
5. [§1.12] The Buddha's discourse on **the 3 trainings**.¹

(Bareau 2) From Rājagaha to Pāṭali,gāma

6. [§§1.13-14] **Amba,laṭṭhikā** [1.13-14], discourse on **the 3 trainings** [1.14].
7. [§1.15] **Nālandā**, the Buddha and order stay at the **Pāvārika mango grove**.
8. [§§1.16-17] **Sāriputta's** lion-roar of faith in the Buddha.
9. [§1.18] The Buddha's discourse on **the 3 trainings**.

(Bareau 3) Pāṭali,gāma

10. [§§1.19-25] **Pāṭali,gāma**: the Buddha stays in the rest-house and receives food offerings there [§§1.19, 22], discourse on **the 3 trainings** [§1.21]; exhorts the audience on moral virtue [§§1.23-25].
11. [§§1.26-28] Pāṭali,gāma's fortifications; future greatness as **Pāṭali,putta** (capital of Aśoka's empire).
12. [§§1.29-30] **Sunīdha and Vassakāra**, chief ministers of Magadha, offer the Buddha and the order a meal.
13. [§§1.31-32] **On the Ganges bank**.

Chapter 2

(Bareau 4) Pāṭali,gāma to Vesālī

14. [§§2.1-3] **Koṭi,gāma**: The Buddha addresses the monks on **the 4 noble truths**.
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19. [§2.14] **Amba,pālī** invites the Buddha and his order for a meal on the following day.
20. [§§2.15-17] **The Licchavīs of Vaiśālī** offer Ambapālī 100,000 pieces of money to give up the meal to them [§2.15]. She turns down the offer [§§2.16-17].
21. [§2.18] The Licchavīs meet the Buddha and hear a Dharma discourse.
22. [§2.19] After the alms offering, Ambapālī donates her mango grove to the order (V 1:232).
23. [§2.20] The Buddha's discourse on **the 3 trainings**.

(Bareau 6) Environs of Vesālī

24. [§§2.21-26] **Beluva**: the Buddha's last rains retreat [§§2.21-22]: the first attack of dysentery; but considering the inopportune moment, he makes an effort to recover [§§2.23-24]. The Buddha declares his openness with no secret teachings [§2.25]; admonishes the monks to take the self as refuge [§2.26].

Chapter 3

25. [§3.1] **Vesālī** on almsround.
26. [§§3.2-6] **The Cāpāla Shrine**: the Buddha praises various shrines [§3.2]. The Buddha tells Ānanda about the possibility of extending his life span, but Ānanda does not catch the hint [§§3.3-3.6].
27. [§§3.7-8] Māra invites the Buddha to enter parinirvana, reminding him of his promise to relinquish his life-span made to Māra during the 5th week after the great awakening.
28. [§§3.9-37] The Buddha relinquishes the rest of his life-span [§§3.9-10]; great tremors [§§3.11-12]. The 8 causes of earth tremors [§§3.13-20], the 8 assemblies [§§3.21-23], the 8 bases for mastery [§§3.24-32], and the 8 liberations [§3.33]. The Buddha tells Ānanda of Māra's visits [§§3.34-36] and his impending parinirvana [§3.37].
29. [§§3.38-48] Ānanda beseeches the Buddha to extend his life-span [§§3.38-40]; the Buddha rebukes him for his hesitance [§§3.41-48].

Chapter 4

(Bareau 7) Vesālī to Kusinārā

30. [§4.1] **Bhaṇḍa,gāma**. On leaving, the Buddha gives Vesālī the "elephant look."

¹ This teaching repeats at §§1.12, 1.14, 1.18, 1.21, 2.4, 2.10, 2.20, 4.4, and 4.12.

31. [§§4.2-3] “The 4 teachings”: *sīla, samādhi, paññā, vimutti*.
 32. [§4.4] The Buddha’s discourse on **the 3 trainings**.
 33. [§§4.5-6] Hatthi,gāma, Amba,gāma, Jambu,gāma and **Bhoga,nagara**.
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 38. [§§4.20-21] The Buddha’s second serious attack of dysentery.
 39. [§§4.22-25] **Kakuttha river**: Ānanda fetches water for the Buddha to drink; the water clears of itself.
 40. [§§4.26-27] **Pukkusa Malla,putta** meets the Buddha and mentions Ālāra Kālāma.
 41. [§§4.28-32] The threshing-house at **Ātumā**: the Buddha’s deep meditation.
 42. [§§4.33-34] Pukkusa the last layman before the Buddha.
 43. [§§4.35-38] The Buddha’s transfiguration.
 44. [§§4.39-41] The elder Cundaka attends to the Buddha.
 45. [§§4.42-43] The exoneration of Cunda: the two most meritorious meals of the Buddha.

Chapter 5

(Bareau 8) Kusinārā: The last moments

46. [§§5.1-3] **Kusinārā**: Upavattana sal grove. The Buddha lies down between the twin sal trees. Widespread miracles, but the Buddha speaks of the “supreme worship,” that is, one’s spiritual practice.
 47. [§§5.4-6] **Upavāṇa**, fanning the Buddha, is told to move aside because devatas are trying to gaze at the Buddha in his last moments. The less developed devatas lament.
 48. [§§5.7-8] Ānanda asks how monks in the future could “see” the Buddha; **the 4 holy places**.
 49. [§5.9] Ānanda asks about how monks should treat **women**.
 50. [§§5.10-11] How **the bodily remains of the Buddha** should be treated. The Buddha admonishes Ānanda not to trouble himself with the funeral rites, which should be left to the laity.
 51. [§5.12] **The 4 persons worthy of a stupa**.
 52. [§§5.13-16] **Ānanda’s grief**; the Buddha consoles him by way of a valediction, and speaks of Ānanda’s charisma.
 53. [§§5.17-18] The Buddha speaks of Kusinārā’s glorious past as **Kusā,vatī**.
 54. [§§5.19-22] Ānanda announces the Buddha’s impending parinirvana to **the Mallas**. They lament.
 55. [§§5.23-30] **Subhadda** the last convert is ordained by the Buddha and becomes an arhat.

Chapter 6

56. [§6.1] **The Buddha’s last instructions**. The Dharma-Vinaya as teacher after the Buddha’s parinirvana.
 57. [§6.2] Monks are to address each other according to **seniority**.
 58. [§6.3] The order may abrogate **the lesser and minor rules**.
 59. [§6.4] The Buddha imposes the supreme penalty on **Channa**.
 60. [§§6.5-7] **The Buddha’s last words**: “All formations are of the nature to decay—strive on diligently!”
 61. [§§6.8-10.1] The Buddha’s **parinirvana process**. Anuruddha explains the process to Ānanda.
 62. [§§6.10.2] The four verses: Brahmā Sahampati, Sakra, Anuruddha, Ānanda.
 63. [§§6.10.3-11] The monks and devas lament.

(Bareau 9) Kusinārā: The last rites

64. [§6.12] Ānanda announces the Buddha’s parinirvana to the Mallas of Kusināra; they lament, and prepare for the Buddha’s last rites.
 65. [§§6.13-16] They honour the Buddha’s remains for 7 days.
 66. [§§6.17-18] Cremation preparations: Ānanda instructs the Mallas.
 67. [§6.19] **Mahā Kassapa** traveling between Pāvā and Kusinārā learns of the Buddha’s parinirvana.
 68. [§6.20] The old Subhadda utters his infamous statement.
 69. [§§6.21-23.1] Four Malla chiefs fail to light the Buddha’s pyre. Mahā Kassapa arrives, and after he and his entourage have paid their last respects, the Buddha’s pyre burst into flames.
 70. [§§6.23.2-28] Eight claimants ask for **the Buddha’s relics**. Dona proposes they be equally distributed.

Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta

The Discourse on the Great Parinirvana | D 16

Theme: The last days of the Buddha

Translated by Piya Tan ©2003, rev & enl 2004; 3rd rev ed 2008

[**Note prefixes:** “§” before a number refers to passages in the Sutta itself. “Intro” refers to an Introduction section.” “Comy” here usually refers to the Commentarial Notes at the end of this chapter. A parenthesized cross-reference without a prefix, eg [8], refers to the section in the same chapter.]

1 Significance of the Sutta

Although the fullest account of the Buddha’s last year is recorded in the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta (D 16),² episodes and sections of it are found elsewhere in the Canon [3]. The two discourses following it in the Dīgha—the Mahā Sudassana Sutta (D 17) and the Jana,vasabha Sutta (D 18)—give detailed accounts of related events. The Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta records the Buddha’s reason for choosing Kusinārā, a “remote jungle township,” to spend his last days, that is, it was the capital of an great ancient king Sudassana [§5.17-18]. His story is told in detail in **the Mahā Sudassana Sutta** (D 17), which apparently is meant for the laity, as it speaks of the king’s greatness as being due to generosity (*dāna*), self-control (*dama*), and self-restraint (*saṃyama*).³

While the Buddha is residing in the brick house [§2.5] at Nāḍika, it is said that the yaksha Jana,vasabha, appears to the Buddha and declares that he was previous king Bimbisāra, now reborn in a host of Vessa,vana, one of the four kings of the quarters (the north) [§§2.5-7]. The full account is given in **the Jana,vasabha Sutta** (D 18).⁴ Various accounts of the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta are also found elsewhere in the Canon [2].

Even on its own, the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta is a remarkable narrative work and is the longest of all extant ancient Indian literary compositions [2]. Scholars have noted the sutta’s uniqueness, for example,

It is neither a dialogue nor a speech on one or more chief points of doctrine, but a continuous record of the latter part of Buddha’s life, his last speeches and sayings, and his death... the sutta is by no means a unified work, but is composed of parts which belong to different ages. At a very early period—probably soon after the death of Buddha—there must already have been a short “Sutta of the perfect Nirvāṇa (of the Buddha),” which, by means of interpolations and additions, grew longer and longer in the course of time, till it became the “*great Sutta of the perfect Nirvāṇa*” which we now have in our Pāli Canon.

(Winternitz, *History of Indian Literature* 2, 1972:39; cf 41 f)

In his article, “The Traditional Date of Kanishka,”⁵ J F Fleet tries to show that the sutta could not have been composed later than 375 BCE, but Winternitz “believe[s] that the final redaction must be a good deal later” (1972:41 n3).

The greatest benefit and satisfaction comes from studying this work right through the first time as one would read a novel or listen to an ancient mythical story or watch a space epic movie (like the Star Wars series). Then one should read through it again and note the episodes and sections that interest one for a better grasp of them. And on a third reading, one should reflect on the Dharma teachings given in it. Here is a table of contents of this remarkable work, with the headings for the nine sections worked out by André Bateau [5]:

The Mahā Parinibbāna is not the usual Pāli sutta. No central doctrine is found in it, and it has a cast of thousands, encompassing both earth and heaven. In fact, a famous Japanese drawing depicts the final scene of the Buddha at Kusinārā with not only the gods and humans, but also animals, mourning the Buddha’s passing. The Buddha begins to assume otherworldly qualities in this Sutta; for example, he is said to have the power to live through the world-cycle [§3.3] and he transfigures himself [§4.37]. In short, it might be said that, by way of style, the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta is more Mahāyāna than Theravāda. Yet, behind and beyond such attempts at mythification, we see a warm and wise human teacher profoundly concerned with ensuring that the faith will be well kept after his passing.

2 The longest ancient Indian work

2.1 The final year of the Buddha’s life is variously recorded in some detail in the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta (D 16), the Mahā Sudassana Sutta (D 17) and the Jana,vasabha Sutta (D 18). The most details, however, are

² D 16/2:72-168 @ SD 9.

³ D 17/2:169-199 @ SD 36.12.

⁴ D 18/2:200-219 @ SD 62.3.

⁵ *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1906:979-992.

found in the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta, “the Great Discourse on the Parinirvana [final nirvana]”⁶ (D 16/ 2:72-167) by itself is the longest of all the Buddhist texts (96 pages of Pali text in the PTS edition), indeed, the longest of all ancient Indian literary compositions still extant. For even though there are longer Indian texts, such as the Brāhmaṇas, these are compiled from small, independent pieces, while the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta “is built according to a uniform plan” (Hinuber 1996: 31).

2.2 Furthermore, it forms *the hub of at least three other long discourses*, that is, the two Dīgha Nikāya suttas that immediately follow: the Mahā Sudassana Sutta (“the Discourse on Mahā Sudassana,” D 17) and the Jana,vasabha Sutta (“the Discourse on Jana,vasabha,” D 18); and also the Sampasādanīya Sutta “the Discourse that Inspires”).⁷ These four suttas are expansions on passages from the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta, as follows:

<u>Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta</u>	<u>Venue</u>	<u>Expanded as</u>	
D 16,1.16/2:81	Amba,laṭṭhikā	Sampasādanīya Sutta	(D 28 = S 47.2)
D 16,2.5-7/2:91-93	Nādika	Jana,vasabha Sutta	(D 18)
D 16,3.49/2:119	Great Wood	Kalīngara Sutta	(S 20.8/2:267 f.)
D 16,5.17-18/2:146 f	Kusināra	Mahā Sudassana Sutta	(D 17)

2.3 Although the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta is in many respects the most important discourse in the Dīgha Nikāya, it differs essentially in form and contents from all the other Pali suttas. It is neither a dialogue nor a discourse on any single doctrine, but a long record, albeit not always continuous, of **the Buddha’s last days** and his parinirvana. Although it forms the literary hub of at least three other suttas, it is not (as a whole) the oldest in the collection. Only some parts of it can be regarded as ancient and original. The Sutta clearly has more than one author, and it gradually from an ancient core until its final redaction.

2.4 The title, Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta, can be translated in at least two ways: either as “the Discourse on the Great Parinirvana” or “the Great Discourse on the Parinirvana.” However, it is clear here that the former is the only correct one for two reasons. Firstly, if we translate it as “the Great Discourse,” there should be an accompanying “*Cūla* Parinibbāna Sutta” (the Lesser Discourse on the Parinirvana,” but there is none. Secondly, *mahā* being affixed to *parinibbāna* clearly qualifies that it as “the great parinirvana,” signifying that it is *the Buddha’s* final passing.⁸

2.5 The Korean specialist on the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta, **An Yang-Gyu**, in closing his paper, “The date and the origin of the Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta,” presents this working thesis, first postulated by Winternitz (1933:39):

- (1) The Proto-MPS⁹ was recited soon after the Buddha’s *parinibbāna*.
- (2) In due course, the Proto-MPS took in new elements required by the later traditions.
- (3) This intermediate MPS [Deutero-MPS] was growing into the MPS which was quite close to the present version with 100 years after the Buddha’s *parinibbāna*.
- (4) The final redaction of MPS as we have it is made as late as the third council.

These tentative ideas, says An, “are subject to the further investigations in two ways: (1) comparing all the versions of MPS; (2) fixing the dates of the passages of MPS which record historical events” (2001: 73).

3 Composition of the sutta

Scholars¹⁰ widely agree that the text of the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta—generally referred to its Sanskrit name of **the Mahā Parinirvāṇa Sūtra**—underwent a gradual process of development, and “various attempts have been made to separate out diverse strata in the text on the basis of comparative study of different textual tradi-

⁶ On the problem of the translation of *parinibbāna* and *nibbāna*, see K R Norman, “Mistaken Ideas about *Nibbāna*,” *The Buddhist Forum*, vol 3, 1995:211-225. A summary of the discussion is given in section §13 here.

⁷ D 28, S 47.2/5:159-161; cf J 5:443.

⁸ On the prefixes *mahā* and *cūla* (or *culla*) in sutta names, see **Satipaṭṭhāna S** (D 22, M 10), SD 13.1 (2).

⁹ MPS = Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta or Mahā,parinirvāṇa Sūtra (only in this study).

¹⁰ A Bareaux, *Recherches sur la biographie du Buddha* (1970-71) & “La Composition et la étapes de la formation du *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* ancien,” 1979:45-103; Przulski, “Le Partage des reliques du Buddha,” 1935-36:341-367; M Winternitz, *A History of Indian Literature*, 1983 2:38 ff; Ernst Waldschmidt (see biblio); and GC Pande, *Studies in the Origins of Buddhism*, rev ed 1974:98-106.

tions, building on the basic assumption about the nature of ‘primitive’ Buddhism and the evolution of Buddhist cultic life” (Trainor 1997:46).¹¹ Waldschmidt distinguishes 51 episodes and classifies them into four groups. He regards the first group, containing episodes reproduced in substantially the same way in the majority of the sources, as the oldest.¹² André Bareau has reconstructed a detailed relative chronology of the sutta episodes. He thinks that the section recounting the Buddha’s last hours, his final admonitions and his passing away to be the earliest portion, the sutta kernel (1979:49).¹³

At some very early period, probably soon after the Buddha’s passing, there was a **short Parinibbāna Sutta**, which, “by means of interpolations and additions, grew longer and longer in the course of time, till it became the ‘great Sutta of the perfect nirvana’ which we now have in our Pali Canon” (Winternitz 1933: 39). Winternitz distinguishes five strata in the sutta (1911:1148 ff). According to him, those “ancient and original” sections of the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta, besides the verses which “bear the stamp of the greatest antiquity,” are as follows (listed according to chapter and section) (1933 id):

- 2.23 The first dysentery attack befalls the Buddha at **Beluva** and which he willfully overcomes.
- 2.25 He assures **Ānanda** that he does not have a teacher’s “closed fist,” and that he has never seen himself as a leader of the order.
- 5.13 f **Ānanda’s grief** at the Buddha’s impending departure and consolation by the Buddha.

T W Rhys Davids has made a concordance of sources of the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta in his Introduction to his translation (D:RD 2:71 f.). All of the 96 pages of the Pali text, with the exception of nine gaps (the original materials)—pp 92 f; 113-115; 117-121; 130-133; 137-140; 148-150; 153; 158-160; 164-167—are found, in nearly identical words, elsewhere in the Canon.

THE ORIGINAL MATERIALS, UNIQUE TO THE SUTTA

- | | | |
|--------------|---------------|--|
| (1) §2.10-11 | (D 2:92-93) | The brick house & Ambapālī’s Grove (mention of location only). |
| (2) §3.34-42 | (D 2:113-115) | The Buddha tells Ānanda about Māra’s approaches in the past and in the present; the parinirvana in 3 months’ time; Ānanda’s belated request & the Buddha’s rebuke. |
| (3) §3.44-51 | (D 2:117-121) | Rebuke of Ānanda continues; the hall of the gabled house; public announcement of the parinirvana in 3 months’ time. |
| (4) §4.26-38 | (D 2:130-133) | Pukkusa presents the golden robes. |
| (5) §5.1-11 | (D 2:137-140) | The sal grove; Upavāṇa; devas’ lamentation; the 4 holy places; attitude to women; the Tathāgata’s remains. |
| (6) §5.19-26 | (D 2:148-150) | The impending parinirvana announced to the Mallas, who then visit the Buddha; Subhadda. |
| (7) §5.29-30 | (D 2:153) | Subhadda’s ordination. |
| (8) §6.11-15 | (D 2:158-160) | Anuruddha consoles Ānanda, instructs Ānanda to announce the Buddha’s passing to the Mallas; laying in state. |
| (9) §6.21-26 | (D 2:176-167) | The cremation and division of relics. |

The original materials amount altogether about 32 or 33 pages, that is, about one-third of the whole. That proportion, Rhys Davids notes, “would be reduced if we were to include passages of similar tendency, or passages of shorter length” (D:RD 2:71). Rhys Davids has worked out a list of those passages that are found in other parts of the Canon (see following page).

¹¹ G Schopen notes that the Pāli MSS are from the 18th century, while the Skt MSS from Turfan date many centuries earlier. See Schopen “Two problems in the history of Indian Buddhism” in 1997:23-55 (ch 2).

¹² Qu by Lamotte 1988a:650 f; cf 587.

¹³ See this Intro [§5] for “Bareau’s analyses” & Reginald Ray, *Buddhist Saints in India*, 1994:386 f.

Concordance of Sources of the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta

(T W Rhys Davids)

[My remarks and additions are within parentheses. The leftmost number sequence refers to the sections in Piya Tan, *The Buddha and His Disciples*, ch 10]

	<u>ch</u>	<u>section</u>	<u>page</u>	<u>Other old Pali texts</u>
1	1	§1-10	72-80	A 4:16-24
2		§16, 17	81-83	D 28 & S 5:159-161
3		§20-34	84-89	U 8.6 & V 1:227 (elaborated); [D 3:209; M 1:354; S 4:183]
4	2	§2, 3	90, 91	S 5:431, V 1:230 f & Nett 166
[		§6-9	91-94	S 55.8/5:356 f
		§6-9	92 f.	S 55.10/5:358-360]
5		§12-13	94, 95	[S 47.2/5:142;] in S 36.6/4:211
6		§14-19	95-98	V 1:231-233 (differs as to location.)
7		§22-26	98-101	S 5:151-154
		§26	100 f	S 3:42 f, 5:163, 164 (all different venues and interlocutors.)
8	3	§1-20	102-109	A 4:308-313
9		§1-10	102-107	S 5:259-263 & U 6.1; [Nett 60]
10		§21-23	109, 110	A 4:30 (nearly = M 1:72)
11		§24-32	110, 111	A 4:305 & 349; M 2:13, 14
12		§33	111, 112	D 2:70, 71; A 4:306 & 349
13		§43	116	Quoted Kvu 559
14	4	§2, 3	122, 123	A 2:1 f & A 4:105 (quoted Kvu 115, different application.)
15		§7-22	123-126	A 2:167-170
16		§13-25	126-129	U 8.5
[		§30	131	V 1:249 f (related story of “one gone forth in old age”).]
17		§39-43	134-136	U 8.5
[	5	§4	138	D 3:141 (possibly on another occasion)]
[		§8	140	A 2:120 f]
18		§11	141, 142	D 2:161
19		§12	142, 143	A 2:245, 246
20		§15	144	S 5:16 (nearly); [A 2:132]
21		§16	145, 146	A 2:133
22		§17, 18	146, 147	D 2:169, 170
23		§27	151	Quoted Kvu 601
24		§28	152	D 1:176; M 1:391, 494; S 2:21; V 1:69, 71
[	6	§1	154	cf S 6.2/1:138-140]
25		§5	154, 155	A 2:79, 80
26		§7-10	155-158	S 1:157-159 (differs as to order of stanzas.)
27		§9	156	A 4:410 ff.
28		§10	157	Tha 905, 1046; A 1:236
29		§17	161	D 2:141, 142
30		§19-20	162, 163	V 2:284, 285 (differs as to order of sentences.)
31		§27	167	(end of text)
[32		§28	168	Buddhaghosa attributes to Sinhalese elders.] (D:R 2:72)

Rhys Davids also notes that “the slight differences, the more important of which are noted in the table, are very suggestive,” that is, No. 26 (the episode of the stanzas uttered at the moment of the Buddha’s death), No. 14 (a four-line verse attributed to the Buddha in our sutta but also found in the *Aṅguttara*), and No. 30 (the old Subhadra’s callous remark after the Buddha’s passing)—which are discussed at length in the Introduction to his translation of the sutta. (Rhys Davids, 1938:73 ff.)

4 Text and recensions

4.1 CHRONOLOGY OF THE PALI CANON. An important point to note here is that all the parallel passages mentioned here, without exception, unlike the original passages, belong to the oldest strata of the Canon. In his *Buddhist India* (London, 1903:188), TW Rhys Davids gives the following interesting chronology of the Pali Canon.

Chronological Table of Buddhist Literature from the Buddha's Time to Aśoka's Time

1. The simple statements of Buddhist doctrine now found, in identical words, in paragraphs or verses recurring in all the books.
2. Episodes found in identical words, in two or more of the existing books.
3. The Sīlas, the Pārāyaṇa, the Octades [Aṭṭhaka] and Saṃyutta Nikāyas.
4. The Dīgha, Majjhima, Aṅguttara and Saṃyutta Nikāyas.
5. The Sutta Nipāta, the Thera- and Therī-gāthās, the Udānas, and the Khuddaka Pāṭha.
6. The Sutta Vibhaṅga and the Khandhakas [of the Vinaya Piṭaka].
7. The Jātakas and the Dhammapadas.
8. The Niddesa, the Itivuttakas, and the Paṭisambhidā.
9. The Peta, vatthu and Vimāna, vatthu, the Apadānas, the Cariyā, piṭaka, and the Buddha, vaṃsa.
10. The Abhidhamma books; the last of which is the Kathā Vatthu, and the earliest probably the Puggala Paññatti.

The above table represents the probable order in which the extant Buddhist documents of this period were composed. They were not yet written down, and a great deal has no doubt been lost.

(T W Rhys Davids, 1903:18)

All these passages belong to the two earliest groups. All are found in books included in groups 4-6; not one occurs in any of the books included in later groups—groups 7-10.

4.2 RECENSIONS OF THE SUTTA. The Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta is available in six main recensions. The Pali version is also preserved in the Taishō Tripiṭaka (T1 ch 2-4 p 11-30). Other Chinese versions are T5 (diverges from the Pali), T6 and T7 (both closer); T1451 ch 35-38, pp 382b-402c. The Sanskrit version, Mahāparinirvāna Sūtra, belonging to the Mūla, sarvāstivāda, has been edited by Ernst Waldschmidt (1950-51),¹⁴ who also gives the parallel texts from the Sarvāstivāda Vinaya in the Tibetan (Dulva 11:535b-652b) and Chinese (one Dharma, -guptaka, three of unknown origins).¹⁵ The French scholar André Bareau and other scholars think that

the unanimous attestation of the six versions for a given passage indicates that it goes back to a period before the sectarian divisions that took place approximately 100-150 years after the Buddha's death. On the basis of the substantial agreement among the six parallel versions, several scholars have concluded that much of the [Mahā Parinirvāna Sūtra] dates back to a period before the sectarian fragmentation of the saṅgha and its subsequent geographical dispersion in the Aśokan period and following.¹⁶

(Trainor 1997:47)

A Sarvāstivāda version is found in the **Gilgit Manuscripts** (ed N Dutt et al, 1939-50), volume 3, page 415. In the early 20th century. **Jean Przyluski** made a comparative of various Mahā Parinirvāna texts in his "Le Parinirvana et le Funérailles du Bouddha" (*Journal Asiatique* 1918-20). Recently, **Mark Allon and Richard Salomon** discovered and published a Gandhārī version of the sutta.¹⁷

¹⁴ Abhandlungen DAWB, Phil. Hist. K1, 1950 and Kl. f. Spr., Lit. und Kunst, 2 parts; *Das Mahāparinirvānasūtra*, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1950-51. Waldschmidt arranges the 51 episodes of **Mahāparinirvāna Sūtra** in 4 classifications: (1) episodes reproduced substantially the same way in the majority of sources; (2) episodes related to the majority of versions, but in a different way; (3) episodes attested to in only a small number of sources; (4) episodes attested to in a single version. "If an authentic tradition ever exists, in the course of time it was subjected to considerable alterations. It is represented more faithfully, it seems, by the Sanskrit version than by the Pāli one" (Lamotte 1988a:650 f).

¹⁵ The Tibetan version is also found in mDo 8:1-231 (*Mahā Parinirvāna Sūtra*) and mDo 8:231-234, and the section called *Myang-hds* or Nirvāna in 2 volumes.

¹⁶ See Pande, *Studies in the Origins of Buddhism*, 1974:12; Snellgrove (ed), *The Image of the Buddha*, 1978:18.

¹⁷ Mark Allon & Richard Salomon (eds), "Fragments of a Gandhārī Version of the Mahāparinirvāna-sūtra in the Schøyen Collection." 2000:243-73.

A K Warder, in his *Indian Buddhism* (1970:67-80), gives his own translation of the Pali version “omitting anything not confirmed by other versions. The main episodes are translated, with a minimum of comment and continuity.” **W Pachow** has compared these four versions of the Mahā Parinirvāna Sūtra with the Pali version, namely.¹⁸

- I:P *Buddha, parinirvāna Sūtra*. Nanjio no 552 tr Po-Fa-Tsu, 290-306 CE, Western Chin, 265-316. 2 fascicles.
- II:B *Mahā Parinirvāna Sūtra of the Dīrgh’āgama Sūtra*. Nanjio no 545 (2) tr Buddha, yaśas and Chu Fonien, 412-413, of the Later Chin, 384-417. 3 fascicles.
- III:N *Parinirvāna Sūtra* or *Vaipulya Nirvāna Sūtra*. Nanjio no 119, tr unknown, Eastern Chin, 317-420. 2 fascicles.
- IV:F *Mahā Parinirvāna Sūtra*. Nanjio no 118, tr Fa-hsien [Faxian] of Eastern Chin, 317-420. 3 fascicles.

T W Rhys Davids’ translation of the sutta is found in volume 2 of his *Dīgha Nikāya* translation, *Dialogues of the Buddha*.¹⁹ The Tibetan version from the *Dulva* (Vinaya) has been translated by **WW Rockhill** in *The Life of the Buddha* (1884:122-147). Recent translations include one by **Maurice Walshe**, in his *Long Discourses of the Buddha* (1995, D:W 223-277). In 1972, **Ñāṇamoli** published his *The Life of the Buddha According to the Pali Canon* (3rd ed 1992: ch 15), the closing chapter of which deals with “the last year” of the Buddha’s life. **Vajirā and Francis Story** have produced a revised translation (“Last Days of the Buddha,” 1998), while **Thanissaro** has translated the last two chapters (“The Great Discourse on the Total Unbinding,” rev ed 2002). The last two are available online.²⁰ Recently, the Dīgha Commentary on the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta has been translated by **An Yang-Gyu** (from Korea) as *The Buddha’s Last Days: Buddhaghosa’s Commentary on the Mahā-parinibbāna* (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 2003).

5 Bateau’s analyses

5.1 André Bateau,²¹ the French scholar, has done extensive study of the historical and doctrinal relationships between the six parallel versions of the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta in several studies.²² Bateau’s detailed analysis of the Parinirvana traditions also takes account of additional Chinese translations of further recensions of the same material: the Dharma, guptaka *Dīrgh’āgama* (tr Buddhayaśas & Chu Fonian, 412-413 CE) = A; *Buddha, -nirvāna Sūtra* (tr Po Fa-tsou, 290-306 CE) = B; *Parinirvāṇa Sūtra* (tr 317-402 CE) = C; *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* (tr Faxian, 417 CE) = D.²³

5.1 His major contribution to the study of our text is in 1979, when Bateau examines and compares the six principal recensions of the sutta—one version each in Pāli and Sanskrit, and four in Chinese and concludes—and concludes that our text formed gradually over several centuries. The number and order of the episodes vary in the different versions, and less than half are found in all six versions. Nevertheless, an analysis of the six versions show (1979:46):

- (1) that there is a common plan among them;
- (2) that the texts share certain central episodes; and
- (3) that the principal episodes almost always appear in the same order.

¹⁸ *Sino-Indian Studies* 1,4 July 1945. See also Nanjio nos 113, 114, 115, 116, 117, 120, 121, 122, 123, 124, 125, 542 and 1121. Also a Chinese tr (ed Carlo Puini), *Giornale della Societa Asiatica Italiana* 21, 1908:59 ff & 22, 1909:1 ff. See also E Windisch, *Māra und Buddha*, Leipzig, 1895:33 ff; H Oldenberg, in *Zeitschrift der deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 53, 1899:121 ff; and J Edkins, in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1881:66 f. See here §5 n on Bateau’s trs.

¹⁹ 2nd ed 1938, 4th ed 1959, D:R 2:71-191.

²⁰ <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/canon/digha>.

²¹ *Recherches sur la biographie du Buddha* (1970=71) & “La Composition et la étapes de la formation progressive du *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* ancien,” 1979:45-103. Other important studies of the text include: Przyłuski, “Le Partage des reliques du Buddha,” 1935-36:341-367; M Winternitz, *A History of Indian Literature*, 1983 2:38 ff; Ernst Waldschmidt (see biblio); and GC Pande, *Studies in the Origins of Buddhism*, rev ed 1974:98-106.

²² 1962, 1963, 1970-71, 1974, 1975, 1979.

²³ See *Recherches sur la biographie du Buddha* 1970, 2:4.

The Sutta in its various versions contains a total of over 80 episodes, an analysis of which shows a relative chronology in which these episodes were added. This however does not tell us the order in which each individual unit came into existence.

5.3 Bareau suggests in “a fragile enough hypothesis” an absolute chronology, in which he locates the addition of the texts to the sutta over some 400 years from the parinirvana (c 480 CE) to the beginning of the Common Era (1979:47). Bareau regards the account of the last hours of the Buddha’s life, his final instructions and his parinirvana as the historical “kernel” of the text compiled within several decades of the Buddha’s passing (1979:50). He dates the passages specifying the 4 holy places and the 4 persons worthy of a stupa much later, to a period between the end of the 3rd century BCE and the beginning of the 1st century CE (1979:69). This conclusion is based on the fact that these passages do not occur in all six extant versions of the text, and that they appear to assume a developed Buddhism (when the Buddha appears no longer to be considered as just a human being) (1979:63).²⁴

5.4 As Bareau²⁵ sees it, the sutta may be divided into **9 major sections**, according to locale of the incidents, and these may in turn be divided into two major groupings, as follows (1979:48) [with my own section headings—in *The Buddha and His Disciples* (Piya Tan, 2004)—here listed in parentheses]:

Bareau’s Nine Sections

- | | | |
|---|--------------|--------------|
| A. <u>Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta §§1-2.20</u> (Later half) | | |
| (1) In the environs of Rājagṛha | [§1.1-12] | [Piya 2] |
| (2) From Rājagṛha to Pāṭaligrāma | [§1.13-18] | [Piya 3] |
| (3) At Pāṭaligrāma | [§1.19-32] | [Piya 4] |
| (4) From Pāṭaligrāma to Vaiśālī | [§2.1-10] | [Piya 5] |
| (5) At Vaiśālī | [§2.11-20] | [Piya 6] |
| B. <u>Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta §§2.21-6.26</u> (Older half) | | |
| (6) In the environs of Vaiśālī | [§2.21-3.48] | [Piya 7-11] |
| (7) From Vaiśālī to Kuśinagarī | [§4.1-43] | [Piya 12-15] |
| (8) At Kuśinagarī: the final hours | [§5.1-6.11] | [Piya 16-21] |
| (9) At Kuśinagarī: the last rites | [§6.12-26] | [Piya 22]. |

Sections 6-9 form the older sections, while sections 1-5 are later. Bareau proposes that the oldest section—“the kernel of the work”—is section 8 (The final hours of the Buddha at Kuśinagarī). Following this are sections 9, then 6, then 7 and then the newer sections (1979:50 f). The oldest part of the text, section 8, minus some episodes added later, according to Bareau, is dated to **the second half of the 5th century BCE**. The next section were added from this time onward, with the latest sections (1-5) added in the 2nd-1st centuries BCE (1979:51).²⁶

Bareau also discusses the development of relic worship after the Buddha’s passing.²⁷

6 Island or lamp?

6.1 ATTA, DĪPA. The most famous and memorable passage from the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta, also found in a number of other places in the Canon, is clearly this:

*Tasmā-t-ih ’Ānanda **atta, dīpā** viharatha **atta, saraṇā anañña, saraṇā, dhamma, dīpā** dhamma, saraṇā anañña, saraṇā* [§2.26].²⁸

²⁴ G Schopen has objected to this methodology that is based on the basic principle that textual unanimity is a sure sign of an early date of composition. He notes that first of all scholars differ regarding the date of sectarian division, and that there is no inscriptional evidence of sectarian division before the 2nd century CE (“Two problems in the history of Indian Buddhism,” 1997:26). Conversely, Schopen proposes that precisely the opposite conclusion should be drawn, ie, that unanimous attestation indicates a late date of composition based on an extended period of harmonization between the sects (op cit, 1997:17).

²⁵ See Reginald Ray, *Buddhist Saints in India*, 1994:386 f. See also “Sutta Contents” above.

²⁶ For other details, see Ray, 1994:386 n2 which I have summarized here.

²⁷ See this Intro (7.4).

²⁸ Lit “Therefore, Ānanda, dwell with yourselves as islands, with yourselves as refuges, with no other refuges—dwell with the Dharma as islands, with the Dharma as refuges, with no other refuges.” I have generally tr *dhamma, dīpa* etc, adverbially guided by the spirit of self-reliance. Cf *yo kho Vakkali dhammaṃ passati so maṃ passati*, etc. S 3:120.

Therefore, Ānanda, dwelt with yourself as an island, with yourself as refuge, with no other refuge—
dwelt with the Dharma as an island, with the Dharma as refuge, with no other refuge.

(D 16,2.26 = 26,1, 26,27; S 22.4, 47.9, 47.13, 47.14)²⁹

The Commentary explains *atta, dīpā* as “dwell, having made the self [yourself like an island in the great ocean” (*mahā, samudda, gata, dīpam viya attānam dīpam patiṭṭhitam katvā viharatha*, DA 2:548, SA 2:268, 3:204).³⁰ It is interesting that the Commentary uses the plural *attānam* though this is not apparent in the textual compound *atta, dīpā*.

The Sutta Nipāta Commentary on *atta, dīpā* in the line “who wander about the world,” *ye atta, dīpā vicaranti loke* (Sn 501) of **the Māgha Sutta** (Sn 5.3) explains, “by their own virtue, having made the self an island, they wander as those influx-free, they say” (*attano guṇe eva attano dīpam katvā vicarantā khīṇāsavā vuccanti*, SnA 2:416). The Dīgha Commentary further explains “What is meant by ‘self’? The mundane and supramundane Dhamma (*lokiya, lokuttaro dhammo*).³¹ Therefore he says next, ‘with the Dharma as an island,’ etc” (DA 3:846; SA 2:268). **Bodhi** notes here that “This comment overlooks the obvious point that the Buddha is inculcating self-reliance.” (S:B 1:1055 n53). The Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta explains the expression to “dwell with yourself as an island” as referring to the practice of satipatthana [§2.26].

Some scholars, however, have rendered *dīpa* here as “light”—Rhys Davids (D:R 2:110), Fausböll (Sn:F 501)—or as “lamp” (Adikaram and Childers), probably because they are influenced by the Western saying “No man is an island” and its negative connotation. The existence of two ancient Buddhist languages, Pali and Sanskrit, provides a dynamic stereoscopic panorama of Buddhism. It helps us to clear a problem in the interpretation of this famous passage from the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta [§2.26]:

6.1.1 Sanskrit. The Sanskrit words *dīpa* (light, lamp) and *dvīpa* (island, continent) are both rendered as *dīpa* in Pali. The Sanskritized passage of the Buddha’s last words (D 2:100) are found in the Mahāvastu, giving *dvīpa*:

ātma, dvīpa bhikṣavo viharatha ananya, dvīpāḥ ātmaśaraṇāḥ ananya, śaraṇāḥ

(Senart, *Le Mahavastu* 1: 334)

The same Sanskrit word is found in the Turfan version of the Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra (Waldschmidt 200).

The **Gāndhārī Dharmapada** also renders the term *dīpa* as “island” (Brough 209 f.). **The Tibetan translation** also uses “island” (*glin*), and not “a light of lamp” (*mar me*).

6.1.2 Chinese mistranslation. Zhu Fo Nian (Former Chin 351-394) rendered it as “a light” (T 1: 15b). Saṅghadeva (Later Chin 384-417) rendered it as “a lamp-light” in the Mādhyāgama: “Make yourself a lamp-light” (T 1:645c). The Chinese Dharmapada (25, 238) also uses “light” (pointed out by P V Bapat).

However, **Guṇabhadra** (Liu Sung dynasty 420-479) rendered *dīpa* as “island” in his translation of the same passage in the Saṃyuktāgama (T2.8a).³²

6.2 THE “ONLY WAY.” In declaring that, after his passing, only the Dharma should be one’s refuge (*dhamma.saraṇa*), the Buddha effectively and radically shifts the focus from the three refuges to **the One Refuge**—the Dharma—that is, one’s practice of the 4 focuses of mindfulness (*sati paṭṭhāna*) that he often discourses on [§§2.12, 2.26]. In this sense, it becomes clear why in the Maha Sati paṭṭhāna Sutta (D 22; M 10), for example, the Buddha declares it to be “the only way” (*ekāyana, magga*) “for the purification of beings.”³³

²⁹ **Mahā, parinibbāna S** (D 16,2.26/2:100), SD 9.1 = **Cakka, vatti Sīha, nāda S** (D 26,1/3:58 = 27/3:77), SD 36.10; **Atta, dīpa S** (S 22.43/3:42), SD 93.8; (**Bhagavā**) **Gilāna S** (S 47.9/5:154); (**Saripaṭṭhāna**) **Cunda S** (S 47.13/5:163); **Ukka, celā S** (S 47.14/5:164 f).

³⁰ Comy to **Cakkavatti Sīhanāda S** (D 26,1/3:58) explains the meaning of *atta, dīpa* as “dwell, having established yourselves as an island, a shelter, a cave [refuge] for crossing over birth (*gati*)” (*attānam dīpam tānam leṇam gatim parāyaṇam patiṭṭhitam katvā viharathā it attho*, DA 2:846).

³¹ “Mundane states” (*lokiya, dhammā*) are all those states of consciousness and mental factors arising in an ordinary worldling or in a saint, but are not associated with the supramundane. “Supramundane states” (*lokuttara, dhammā*) are the 4 paths, the 4 fruitions and nirvana.

³² G H Sasaki, *Linguistic Approach to Buddhist Thought*. Delhi: MLBD, 1986: 58-63.

³³ D 2:290 = 315 = M 1:55 = 63 = S 5:141 = 167 f. = 185 f. = Kvu 158 = Vism 3.

It is important here to understand that the Buddha is referring to mental cultivation (*bhāvanā*). For mental cultivation to progress, we need to be strongly grounded in **moral virtue** or moral conduct (*sīla*), so that such a mental cultivation will lead to wisdom (*paññā*) and spiritual freedom (*vimutti*) (M 1:195-197). As such, the “only way” here does not refer to a particular “method” of meditation, whether it is called “Vipassanā” or “Sati-*paṭṭhāna*.”³⁴ The “only way” here refers to **the noble eightfold path**, which is clear from the Dhammapada:

*Maggān’atthaṅgiko seṭṭho
saccānaṃ caturo padā
virāgo seṭṭho dhammānaṃ
dīpadānaṃ ca cakkhumā.*

The best of paths is the eightfold path.

The best of truths are the 4 sayings [the noble truths].

Non-attachment is the best of states.

The best of the two-legged is the Seeing One.

*Eso’va maggo natth’añño
dassanassa visuddhiyā
etaṃhi tumhe paṭipajjatha
Mārass’etaṃ pamohanam*

This indeed is the only way,

There is none other for the purity of vision:

Follow then this path:

This is the bewilderment of Māra [the Bad One]. (Dh 273 f)

It does not refer to “Vipassanā” meditation (there is no such meditation in early Buddhism) or to one triumphalist school of meditation to the exclusion of others. This *ekāyana* statement should be understood in the context of the Buddha’s final instruction here—and the Buddha’s prophecies of what is popularly known as **the “Dharma-ending age.”**³⁵ After the Buddha’s passing, he is no more the practitioner’s refuge as it were (not in person, anyway). As for the Saṅgha, its gradual laicization and degradation increases as the number of those who transgress the Vinaya increases and the number of arhats and saints decrease.³⁶

6.3 THE ONE REFUGE. The one refuge, the Dharma as one’s practice, is the “one and only way,” which we have noted is the noble eightfold path, which is a statement of the 4 focuses of mindfulness in terms of total practice: on the inter-personal and social level (virtue), the personal level (mind or concentration), and the spiritual level (wisdom and freedom).

The “3 refuges” of Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha are here revised and reduced to the barest minimum: one-self and the Dharma. Matthew Dillon, in his remarkable comparative study of the last days of Socrates and the Buddha in “Dialogues with Death,” remarks: “However much support may be offered by teacher and community, it all comes down to you and the Truth” (2000:547) [13.1]. The Buddha is dead, long live the Dharma! [§2.26]³⁷

7 Mortuary rites and holy places

7.1 MORTUARY PREPARATIONS. This section is mainly based on a useful study on “Buddhist relic veneration in India” by **Kevin Trainor** (1997:32-65 = ch 2). Trainor claims that the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta is the locus classicus for the traditional Theravāda account of the origins of **the cult of relic worship**,³⁸ which is closely related to the stūpa cult. All this is of course related to mortuary rites and ancestor worship. Ānanda asks the Buddha how his remains (*sarīre*) are to be treated [§5.10]:

“Bhante, how are we to treat the Tathāgata’s remains?”³⁹

“Do not worry yourselves about the funeral rites [relic worship],⁴⁰ Ānanda. You should strive for the highest goal, devote yourselves to the highest goal, and dwell with your minds tirelessly, zealously devoted to the highest goal. There are wise kshatriyas, wise brahmin, wise householders who are devoted to the Tathāgata: they will take care of the Tathāgata’s funeral.” (D 16,5.10/2:141)

Here the Buddha answers in relation to Ānanda himself since he is only a streamwinner and not yet an arhat. The Buddha is exhorting Ānanda to focus on his own personal spiritual development. Understandably, in such a

³⁴ See **Satipaṭṭhāna Ss** (D 22; M 10), SD 13.

³⁵ See Piya Tan, *The Buddha and His Disciples*, 2004:6.21.

³⁶ See **Saddhamma Paṭirūpaka S** (S 16.13/2:223 f); see *The Buddha and His Disciples*, 2004:6.22.

³⁷ Further, on the Dharma being above even the Buddha himself, see **Gārava S** (S 6.2/1:138-140), SD 12.3; also SD 3.1 (1.4.2).

³⁸ See Trainor, *Relics, Ritual, and Representation in Buddhism*, esp 1997:49-65. See, however, §7.4 here, where I think otherwise.

³⁹ *Katham mayam bhante Tathāgatassa sarīre paṭipajjāmā ti.*

⁴⁰ “Funeral rites,” *sarīra, pūja*.

poignant moment, Ānanda characteristically thinks of all the pressing matters to be settled in the face of the Buddha's impending parinirvana. Ānanda, then repeats the question in a slightly different way, with a greater sense of urgency [§5.11]:

“But, Bhante, what should we do with the Tathāgata's remains?”⁴¹

Pressed for an answer, the Buddha answers that the Tathāgata's remains should be treated like those of a wheel-turning king, that is to say, the body (*sarīram*) should be wrapped alternately with new unbleached cotton cloth and with a layer of teased cotton⁴² for the length of 500 yugas.⁴³ A *yuga* is the length of an Indian plough, that is, 9 spans (DPL 605 f). A span (*vidatthi*) is the distance between the ends of the thumb and the little finger extended (about 20 cm = 8 ins). As such, a yuga is about 1.8 m (5.9 ft), and 500 yugas will be 900 m (984 yd).

However, even this dimension seems disproportionate, albeit smaller than “500 times.” With so much cloth and cotton wool, the Buddha's body would end up looking like a giant cloth ball! However, if the cloth is narrow bandage-like strips—a few fingers' breadth wide—(like those used to wrap an Egyptian mummy) then, the dimensions will appear more manageable. Probably, this bandaging is part of a precremation embalming process.⁴⁴

The body should then be placed in an oil-vat of iron and covered with an iron lid. The pyre should comprise only of fragrant material, and the body then cremated. Then a **stupa** [cairn or burial mound] is built over the relics at the crossroads [“where four highways meet”].⁴⁵ And the faithful who offer a garland, scent, or perfume powder, or bow down there, or brighten their minds there, it will be for their profit and welfare for a long time to come. [§5.11]

The Buddha then tells Ānanda that the following four people are **worthy of a stupa**: the Buddha, a Pratyeka Buddha (a fully self-enlightened Buddha who does not establish a dispensation), a disciple of the Buddha, and a wheel-turning king. The reason for this is that such an act brings peace of mind, and dying with such a thought leads one to a happy rebirth [§5.12]. The point here is not that dying in the holy land will bring one a happy rebirth, but rather that dying with a calm joyful mind (*pasanna,citta*) brings one happy rebirth.⁴⁶

7.2 THE SUPREME WORSHIP

7.2.1 Apparently, we see here the canonical warrant (by the Sutta redactors) for the practice of pilgrimage and relic-worship. The Dīgha Commentary, however, provides an insight into Ānanda's intention behind his request:

Here the Blessed One thought, “Ānanda is thinking, ‘We will not be able to see the mentally cultivated ones.’ Let me now tell him places for seeing mentally cultivated one, places where they can live

⁴¹ *Katham̐ pana mayam̐ bhante Tathāgatassa sarīre patipajjitabban ti?*

⁴² *Rañño Ānanda cakkavattissa sarīram̐ ahatena vatthena veṭhenti. Ahatena vatthena veṭhetvā vihatena kappāsena veṭhenti* (D 16,5.11/2:141). “Teased cotton” here is probably what we might today call “cotton wool.”

⁴³ *Etena upāyena pañcahi yuga,satehi* (D 16,5.11/2:142). Apparently, all the better known English trs (Rhys Davids, Walshe, Vajirā & Story, and Ṭhanissaro) overlooked or mistranslated *yuga*.

⁴⁴ For a recent comment on this interesting aspect of “the Buddha's funeral,” see JS Strong 2007.

⁴⁵ This ref to crossroads [“where four highroads meet”] (*cātum,mahā,pathe*) has at least two levels of meaning. The first meaning has been discussed by RA Gunatilaka in “Ancient Stūpa Architecture: The significance of cardinal points and the cātummahāpatha concept” (1975:34-48), where the allusion is to the universal hegemony of the *cakkavatī* or wheel-turning king. In the Dharma sense, the Buddha is a “wheel-turner” but the wheel is the *Dharma,cakra* (*dhamma,cakka*), the wheel of truth, and not the *ājñā,cakra* (*āñā,cakka*), the wheel of power. The second meaning is more common in the suttas. In **Dhamma,cetiya S** (M 89), for example, the rajah Pasenadī praises the Buddha regarding how the Sangha members are so well disciplined “with neither rod nor sword” (M 89.13/2:122). In **Aṅgulimāla S** (M 86), the rajah again makes the same praise in reference to how the Buddha has tamed the bloodthirsty bandit, Aṅgulimāla, “with neither rod [fear] nor sword [force]” (M 86.14a/2:102). This is an example of the difference between the “wheel of power” (*āñā,cakka*), ie the sphere of political power, and the “wheel of truth” (*dhamma,cakka*), the realm of the Dharma (VA 10 = KhA 1:95; MA 2:278; ThaA 3:48).

⁴⁶ On the Buddhist pilgrimage, see sub-section (7g) here.

and will not have to seek here and there for an opportunity of seeing mentally cultivated ones.’ Thinking thus, he says, ‘There are these four’,” and so on.⁴⁷ (DA 2:582)

This admonition concerns the benefits of “being in the presence of those who embody in their physical demeanor the Buddhist ideal of enlightenment” (Trainor 1997:50). As we have noted [§5.5n], this spiritual practice is an adaptation of the Vedic practice of *darśana* (P *dassana*, Eng darshan), and asserted in such sayings as “the seeing of recluses...this is a supreme blessing”⁴⁸ (Kh 5.9/3). The significance of this passage becomes evident in the light of opening episode of this chapter [§§5.1-2].

7.2.2 In the Mallas’ sal grove, the Buddha lies down between the two sal trees where he will pass away that same day. The Sutta records that the twin sal trees, though it is out of season, burst into fruit and flower, showing their blossoms upon the Buddha. *Mandāra* flowers and sandalwood powder gently rain from the heavens, and divine music is heard, by way of offering to the Buddha (*tathāgatassa pūjāya*). [§§5.2-3a].

The Buddha then exhorts Ānanda that such offerings are not the highest form of honour or veneration. The highest form of respect—the “supreme worship” (*paramā pūjā*)—any monk, nun, layman or laywoman can show the Buddha is to live practising the Dharma in accordance with the Dharma.⁴⁹ [§5.3.2]

7.2.3 The Dīgha Commentary on this passage explains that the Bodhisattva did not make the resolution at the feet of Dīpaṅkara Buddha to become a Buddha for the sake of garlands, scents, music and song. The Buddha rejects this kind of worship for the sake of the long life of the teaching (*sāsana*) and for the benefit of the assembly (the monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen).

If “**worship with material things**” (*āmisa,pūjā*)⁵⁰ were not rejected, then his followers would not cultivate moral virtue, mental concentration and insight, but instead would spend their lives worshipping (and thinking in terms of material things). Not even a thousand monasteries equal to the Mahā, vihāra, or a thousand caityas (shrines) equal to the Mahā, cetiya,⁵¹ it notes, are sufficient to support the teaching. And concludes: “Now, for the Tathāgata, right practice is proper worship, and surely it has been laid down by him for supporting the teaching.”⁵²

The Commentary gives a detailed explanation of the key words in connection with the “**worship with non-material things**” (*nirāmisa,pūjā*) thus:⁵³

⁴⁷ *Atha Bhagavā: Ānando “mano,bhāvanīyānam dassanam na labhissāmī ti cinteti, hand’ assa mano,bhāvanīyānam dassanaññhānam ācikkhāmi, yattha vasanto ito c ‘to ca anāhiñḍitvā va lacchati mano,bhāvanīye bhikkhū dassanāyā ti, cintetvā cattār’imāni ti ādim āha.*

⁴⁸ *Samañānañ ca dassanam...etam maṅgalam uttamam.* See KhA 150 f= KhA:Ñ 163 f.

⁴⁹ *Yo kho Ānanda bhikkhu vā bhikkhunī vā upasakā vā upāsikā vā dhammānudhamm,paṭipanno viharati samīci,paṭipanno anudhamma,cārī, so Tathāgataṃ sakkaroti garukaroti māneti pūjeti paramāya pūjāya* (D 5,3/2:138).

⁵⁰ There are 2 kinds of worship (*pūjā*): worship (or honouring) with material things (*āmisa,pūjā*) and worship with practice (*paṭipatti,pūjā*) (D 2:138; A 1.93). Dīgha Comy replaces *paṭipatti,pūjā* with “worship with non-material things” (*nirāmisa,pūjā*) (DA 5:179): see next para.

⁵¹ *Mahā,vihāra,sadisañ hi vihāra,sahassam mahā,cetiya,sadisañ ca cetiya,sahassam pi sāsanaṃ dhāretum na sakkonti.*

The Mahāvihāra was the central monastery in Anurādhapura built by Devanampiya Tissa (247-207 BCE) that came to be identified with orthodox Theravāda tradition in Sri Lanka. When Anurādhapura was abandoned around the 13th century, the history of Mahāvihāra came to an end. **The Mahācetiya** is presumably a reference to the Mahā Thūpa (Great Stupa) in Anurādhapura built by Duṭṭha,gāmaṇī after his victory over the Tamils and which is said to enshrine one-eighth of all the Buddha’s relics.

⁵² *Sammā,paṭipatti pana Tathāgatassa anucchavikā pūjā, sā hi tena paṭṭhitā c’eva sakkoti sāsanaṃ ca sandhāretum* (DA 2:578).

⁵³ *Tattha dhammānudhamma,paṭipanno ‘ti nava,vidhassa lokuttara,dhammassa anudhammam pubba,bhāga,paṭipadam paṭipanno. Sā y’eva pana paṭipadā anucchavikattā “sāmīci ti vuccati, tam sāmīcim paṭipanno’ti sāmīcī,paṭipanno. Tam eva pubba,bhāga,paṭipadā,sāṅkhatam anudhammam carati pūretī ti anudhamma,cārī.*

Pubbabhāga,paṭipadā’ti ca silam ācāra,pañnatti dhutaṅga,samādānam yāva gotra,bhūto sammā,paṭipadā veditabbā. Tasmā yo bhikkhu chasu agāraṅgesu paṭiṭṭhāya paññattim atikkamati, anesanāya jīvitam [Be jīvikam] kappeti, ayam na dhammānudhamma,paṭipadam [Se -paṭipanno]. Yo pana sabbam attano paññatta,sikkhāpadam jina,velam jina,mariyādam jina,kāḷa,suttam anumattam pi na vītikkamati, ayam dhammānudhamma,paṭipanno nāma.

Bhikkhunīyā pi es’eva nayo. Yo pana upāsako pañca,verāni dasa akusala,kamma,pathe samādāya vattati appeti [PTS omits appeti], ayam na dhammānudhamma,paṭipanno. Yo pana tīsu saraṅgesu pañcasu sīlesu dasasu sīlesu paripūrakārī [Se paripūrīkārī] hoti, māsassa aṭṭha uposathe karoti, dānam deti, gandha,pūjam mālā,pūjam karoti, mātaram upaṭṭhāti, pitara⁵ upaṭṭhāti, dhammike samaṇa,brāhmaṇe upaṭṭhāti, ayam dhammānudhamma,paṭipanno nāma hoti. Upāsikāya pi es’eva nayo.

Here, “practising the Dharma in accordance with the Dharma” (*dhammānudhamma,paṭipanno*) means practising the preliminary path (*pubba,bhāga,paṭipadā*), practicing the ninefold supramundane states.⁵⁴ This very path is called “proper” (*sāmīci*) due to its suitability; it is “proper practice,” as such it is called *sāmīci,paṭipanno*.

Anudhamma,cārī means one, filled with the Dharma, conducts oneself in that same preliminary path.

Pubba,bhāga,paṭipadā should be known as referring to moral virtue, the rules of right conduct [monastic rules], the observance of the ascetic practices⁵⁵—that is, the right practice leading to entry into the lineage [ie streamwinning etc]. As such, a monk who persists in the six kinds of disrespect,⁵⁶ transgresses the monastic rules (*paññatti*), earns a living through wrong false means (*anesanā*)—he is not one who practises the Dharma in accordance with the Dharma. But for one who does not transgress any of the monastic rules promulgated in the Conqueror’s time, by the limits of good conduct set by the Conqueror, like using the Conqueror’s black thread (*jina,kāḷa,sutta*)⁵⁷—he is said to be one who practises the Dharma in accordance with the Dharma.

Similarly for a nun, this is the case.

As regards a layman who persists in the 5 bads (*pañca,verāni*) [the habitual breaking any of the 5 Precepts], following the 10 unwholesome courses of conduct⁵⁸—he is one who does not practise the Dharma in accordance with the Dharma. But for one who fulfills the 3 refuges, the 5 precepts, and the 10 precepts; who keeps the *uposatha* [observance of the 8 or the 10 precepts] on eight days of the month;⁵⁹ who gives food-offerings; who makes offerings of incense and of garlands; who supports

Paramāya pūjāyā ‘ti uttamāya pūjāya, ayam hi nirāmisā,pūjā nāma sakkoti mama sāsanam sandhāretum. Yāva hi imā catasso parisā mañ imāya pūjāya pūjessanti, tāva mama sāsanam majjhe nabhassa puṇṇa,cando viya virocissatī ti dasseti. (DA 2:578 f).

⁵⁴ “The ninefold supramundane states” (*nava,lokuttara,dhammā*) are the 4 paths (*magga*) of sainthood—streamwinning, once-return, non-return and arhathood—their respective fruits (*phala*), and nirvana (Dhs 193,245).

⁵⁵ On the 13 ascetic practices (*dhutaṅga*), see **Bakkula S** (M 124), SD 3.15 (2).

⁵⁶ “Disrespect” (*agāraḷa*). The 6 kinds of respect” (*gāraḷa* or *gāraḷatā*) are respect for the Teacher (*satthu,gāraḷatā*), for the Dharma (*dhamma,gāraḷatā*), for the Sangha (*saṅgha,gāraḷatā*), for the training (*sikkhā,gāraḷatā*), for heedfulness (*appamāda,āraḷatā*), and for hospitality (*paṭisanthāra,gāraḷatā*) (A 3:330).

⁵⁷ “**The Conqueror’s black thread**” means that the Conqueror [the Buddha], taking the role of a great carpenter, using a black thread, shows the Dharma regarding that which should be renounced and that which should be grasped within the confines of the training-rules (*Jina,kāḷa,suttam* *jina,mahā,vaḍḍhakinā ṭhapitañ vajjetabba,gahetabba,dhamma,sandas-sana,kāḷa,suttam sikkhā,mariyādam*) (DAṬ 2:228).

⁵⁸ “Ten unwholesome courses of conduct” (*akusala,kammamatha*). See (**Kusalākusala**) **Saṅcetanika S 1** (A 10.206/5:-292-297), SD 3.9.

⁵⁹ *Uposatha*. **The Indian year** is divided into 3 seasons of about 4 months each—the cold season (winter, *hemanta*; cool, *sisira*) (Nov-Feb), the hot season (spring or “heat,” *gimhāna*, comprising spring, *vasanta*, Mar-May & summer, *gimha*, May-Jul) and the rains (*vassāna*, Jul-Sep; autumn, *sārada*, Sep-Nov). Each Indian lunar month (*māsa*) begins on the 1st day of the waning moon and ends on the full moon. As such, each moon (month) has two halves or fortnights (*pakkhā*): the dark fortnight (*kaṇha,pakkha*) and the bright fortnight (*sukkha,pakkha*). The 3rd and 7th fortnights of each quarter-year (ie 4 moons = 8 fortnights) has 14 days, the other fortnights 15 days each. During the fortnight, the nights of the full moon and the new moon (either the 14 or 15th) and the night of the half-moon (the 8th) are regarded as especially auspicious: these are the *uposatha* (observance) days. On the full moon and new moon days, the monks recite the Pāṭimokkha (code of monastic rule) and the laity visit the monasteries to listen to the Dharma and to meditate. On the *uposatha* days of the fortnight—ie the 8th (*aṭṭhamī*), the 14th (*cātuddasī*) or 15th (*pañnarāsī*) days, and sometimes incl the 5th day (*pañcamī*)—the laity observe the 8 *uposatha* precepts (V 1:87, 102; M 1:39, 2:74; A 4:248; Sn 401; Vv 37.11; Thī 31; J 4:1, 5:173, 194, 6:232; Cp 1:10:4; Vism 227 f). On *pañcamī,aṭṭhamī,cātuddasī,pañnarasīnam uposatha,divasā*, see Ujl 192,28. The “extraordinary half or fortnight” (*pāṭihāriya,pakkha*) is an ancient extra holy day now not observed (AA 2:234; SnA 378; Ujl 2:55; Thī:N 67 f n31). The “eight days” of observance mentioned here probably includes the “extra holy day,” observed during the commentarial times, ie 4 days of observance for each of the 2 fortnights of the moon. In (**Anuruddha**) **Upakkilesa S** (M 128), Anuruddha says that Nandiya and Kimbila would go to his residence “every fifth day (of the week) (*pañcāhikam*)” to discuss the Dharma for the whole night (M 128,14/3:157; MA 2:242; KhA 147). In this way, they keep an extra *uposatha*, besides full moon and new moon days. This would total 6 observances a month. Apparently, the monthly 8 observances are <http://dharmafarer.org>

mother; who supports father; who supports Dharma-minded recluses and brahmins—he is said to be one who practises the Dharma in accordance with the Dharma.

Similarly for a laywoman, this is the case.

“The supreme worship” (*paramā pūjā*) means the highest worship. He [the Buddha] declares, “This is called the worship with non-material things (*nirāmisa, pūjā*) because it is able to sustain my teaching [Dispensation]. Indeed, insofar as these 4 companies (of monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen) worship me with this kind of worship, my teaching will shine forth like the full moon in the middle of the sky.”

(DA 2:578 f)⁶⁰

We see here in Buddhaghosa’s commentary, a hint of a growing distinction between lay and monastic practice despite the fact that the original passage is addressed to “whatever monk, nun, layman or laywoman” [§5.3.2]. Buddhaghosa, however, here gives a broader definition of the practice of “the Dharma in accordance with the Dharma.” However, this trend of external and physical offerings (*amisa, pūjā*) became a popular practice amongst the monks of post-Buddha India, such as building stupas and caves, donating towards their maintenance, and ceremonies for “merit transference.”⁶¹

7.2.4 The “supreme worship” that the Buddha speaks of in the Mahā, parinibbāna Sutta should be examined and reflected alongside a similar statement on true spiritual practice, that is, **the Gārava Sutta** (S 6.2). The Sutta, in fact, gives the rationale for the supreme worship: the Buddha places the Dharma above even himself.⁶² For, it is the Dharma that makes the Buddha. By that same token, even with the Buddha’s passing, the Dharma is still available to us. But the effort must be made by us to touch the Dharma.

7.3 STUPAS AND CAITYAS.⁶³ The words “caitya” (P *cetiya*) and “stupa” (P *thūpa*) are sometimes misunderstood.⁶⁴ From the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta, it is evident that **caityas** originally referred to open-air nature or tree shrines (Dh 118), common in pre-Buddhist India [§§3.1 f, 3.46].⁶⁵ One of the Buddha’s opening teachings in the sutta is this:

Ānanda, so long as the Vajjīs honour, respect, esteem and venerate the Vajjī shrines, both those within the city and outside it, and do not neglect the due offerings as given and made to them formerly, their growth is to be expected, not their decline.

(D 16,4/2:75)

Such shrines were popular with the Buddha and his monks as dwellings and meditation spots. Such tree shrines were often the “abodes of yakshas” (*yakkha-ṭ, thānāni*, DA 520), that is, either they were actually haunts of yakshas (who were either tutelary spirits or ogres) or shrines dedicated to them (eg Gotamaka shrine, DA 373). Such shrines were also popular with other recluses (*samaṇā*) probably because they attracted local residents and devotees who brought alms to them.⁶⁶

Bureau, quoting from the Mahāsaṅghika Vinaya (T 1425:498b), has shown that this early sectarian school, the Mahāsaṅghika, clearly distinguished between *stūpa* and *caitya* (1962:240). He thinks that the *caityas* were memorials without relics marking locations for the purpose of recalling important event in the Buddha’s life, while *stūpas* contained the actual remains of the Buddha. Bureau associates *caityas* with the four sacred sites in the Buddha’s life. **The Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta** (D 16) and **Samvega Sutta** (A 4.118)⁶⁷ list the 4 places that arouse samvega [a sense of urgency] (*saṁvejanīya-ṭ, thānā*)⁶⁸ as follows:

(1) the place of the nativity (Lumbini Park, modern Rummindei);

a commentarial innovation. For more details on *uposatha*, see Sn:P (unpublished) endnote to Hemavata S (Sn 153/9.9:1a). Cf Indian calendar (9d)n here below.

⁶⁰ See Trainor 1997:52-54 for his comments.

⁶¹ See eg G Schopen 1985. On monastic funerals, see Schopen 1992.

⁶² S 6.2/1:138-140 @ SD 12.3.

⁶³ This section is mainly sourced from Trainor, *Relics, Ritual, and Representation in Buddhism*, 1997:34-35 (forming part of ch 2). This ch is an excellent reading in this connection.

⁶⁴ See Ency Bsm: Cetiya (Jotiya Dhirasekera).

⁶⁵ D 16.3.1 f/2:102, 16.3.46/2:117 f; also Sārandada Cetiya (D 2:75); Ānanda Cetiya (D 2:123, 126). See DA 373. BC Law, “Cetiya in Buddhist Literature” in *Studia Indi-Iranica: Ehrengabe für Wilhelm Geiger*, ed Walter Wüst, Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1931:42-48. The cult of yaksha-veneration is discussed in Odette Viennot, *Le Culte de l’arbre dans l’Inde ancienne*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1954: esp 113-120. (Refs fr Trainor 1997: 34 n12.)

⁶⁶ A L Basham, *The Wonder That Was India*, NY: Grove Press, 1959:262.

⁶⁷ A 4.118/2:120 f.

⁶⁸ On “sense of urgency” (*saṁvega*), see sub-section (7f) here. For a discussion on Buddhist pilgrimage, see sub-section (7g) here. On 8 such occasion or places (*aṭṭha saṁvega, vatthu*), see KhpA 235.

- (2) the place of the great Awakening (Uruvelā on the Nerañjarā river, modern Ureli on the Lilanja river);
- (3) the place of the first discourse (the Deer Grove at Isipatana, modern Sahet-Mahet); and
- (4) the place of the final passing-away (Kusināra, modern Kashgar). (D 16,5.8/2:140; A 4.118/2:120 f)⁶⁹

Bareau argues that these outward form of the respective monuments was so similar that the two—stupa and caitya—were confounded with one another and the distinction no longer maintained (1974a: 275-299). Kevin Trainor, in his *Relics, Ritual, and Representation in Buddhism*, remarks that

This distinction may find corroboration in the Pali [Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta], where the term *cetiya* is used to refer to the four sites worthy of pilgrimage, while the term *thūpa* appears to be reserved for a monument enshrining corporeal remains [D 2:141 f]. Additional support for a distinction between the two terms emerges from a study of the cult centered around Mahāyāna Buddhist texts.⁷⁰

(Kevin Trainor 1997:35; amplifications from Trainor’s fnn; emphasis added)

I shall discuss in the next sub-section [7d] that Trainor errs in claiming that “the term *thūpa* appears to be reserved for a monument enshrining corporeal remains [D 2:141 f].”

Trainor, however, gives a helpful etymological and historical discussion on the caitya and stupa. He discusses a few possible etymologies of *stūpa* (P *thūpa*), the most important of which is √*stūp*, “to heap up, pile, erect” (found in Pāṇini’s *Dhātu, pāṭha*). Most commentators derive the word *caitya* (P *cetiya*) from *citā*, “a funeral pile” [or pyre], which comes from √*ci*, “to pile up, arrange.” *Cetiya*, the Pāli form of the Sanskrit *caitya*, occurs in the Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit in the sense of an “object or person worthy of veneration” (BHSD 233).

In the Vedic tradition of the Buddha’s time, the caitya appears to refer to some kind of shrine at which a *balī* or offering would be made.⁷¹ Dikshitar also notes that the law books of Manu and Yajñā, valkya use the term *caitya, vrkṣa* to refer to trees in the burial ground marking the boundary limits of the village, a fact that he connects with the ancient Indian practice of propitiating powerful spirits thought to reside in trees (1938:446-448). The Dhammapada is instructive here:

Many humans, threatened by fear, seek refuge
In hills [rocks] and in forests, and in **grove shrines and tree shrines**. (Dh 118)⁷²

The caitya, as such, Trainor concludes, covers a range of meanings

from associations with the place of the Vedic fire sacrifice, to the place of cremation and burial, to sacred groves and trees associated with power spirits. What is striking, however, is the fundamental tension between the Vedic fire altar as a sacred place associated with ritual purity and the site of cremation and burial with its associated threat of impurity. How these seemingly contradictory ideas became joined in the Buddha understanding of the *caitya* demands further consideration.

(Trainor 1997:37 f)

Paul Mus has done a complete analysis of the brahmanic sacrificial cult in terms of its significance for the practice of relic veneration in the introduction to his 2-volume study of Borobudur, *Barabudur: esquisse d’une histoire du Bouddhisme fondée sur la critique archéologique des texts* (Hanoi, 1935). His broad and complex ideas are difficult to summarize, but an important point relevant here is that he sees the continuity between the

⁶⁹ Bareau discusses the close connection between **sacred trees and caityas**, noting that the 4 holy places were all identified with sacred trees (1974b:16-17).

⁷⁰ Trainor’s fn: “Gregory Schopen, ‘The Phrase,’ [1975:]151-152. Note, however, Schopen’s more recent observation calling attention to an apparent preference for the item *cetiya* in both Andhran epigraphy and in some canonical Pali literature, a characteristic that he suggests may be evidence for mutual contact and influence; see ‘An Old Inscription,’ [1991:] 322 n38; cf Schopen, ‘The Stūpa Cult,’ [1989:]91.”

⁷¹ V R R Dikshitar, “Origin and Early History of Caityas.” *Indian Historical Quarterly* 14, 1938:444 f. The term *balī* is found in the Pali Canon, see **Ādiya S** (A 3:45 f) where the fivefold offerings (*pañca, balī*) are mentioned (A 5.41/3:45 f). See SD 2.1 (2003).

⁷² *Bahuṃ ve saraṇaṃ yanti | pabbatāni vanāni ca | ārāma, rukkha, cetiyāni | manussā bhaya, tajiṭṭā*. See Dikshitar 1938: 467 n15 & Dh:CP 248.

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brahmanic sacrifice centred around the *agni, cayana*—the ritual of “piling up” (*cayana*) of bricks to form the fire altar—and the cultic veneration of the Buddha centering around the stupa and its relics,

Mus argues that the stupa serves as an object of mediation—he uses the neologism “mesocosm” (“middle world”)—between the human and nirvana. The stupa represents the body of the Buddha who has passed into parinirvana, a body brought back to life by his corporeal remains and present (or, *ad sanctos*, a term used by Schopen).⁷³ Mus thinks that the cult of relic veneration centres around the notion that the Buddha’s continued presence in the world⁷⁴—something denied in the early teachings—and that this notion and its attending practices are derived from magical beliefs widely prevalent in Asia. In this case, they are closely analogous to the ritual of brahmanic sacrifice centred around the *agni, cayana*.⁷⁵

7.4 RELIC AND STUPA WORSHIP

7.4.1 *Sarīra* and *sarīra, pūjā*. André Bareau, in his “La *Parinirvāṇa* du Bouddha et la naissance de la religion bouddhique,”⁷⁶ traces the practice of the veneration of Buddha relics back to the first decades following the Final Parinirvana. He bases his arguments mainly on this passage [§5.10]:

“Bhante, how are we to treat the Tathāgata’s bodily remains [*sarīre*]?”

“Do not worry yourselves about **the *sarīra, pūjā***,”⁷⁷ Ānanda. Come now, Ānanda, you should strive for your own good, devote yourselves to your own good, and dwell with your minds tirelessly, zealously devoted to your own good. There are wise kshatriyas, wise brahmins, wise householders who are devoted to the Tathāgata: they will take care of the Tathāgata’s funeral rites. (D 16,5.10/2:141)

Following Bareau, most western scholars have interpreted *sarīra, pūjā* as “relic worship.”⁷⁸ Based on this view, the passage apparently prohibits monastics from “relic worship.” Bareau concludes his paper by saying that the monks at first had nothing to do with the practice and were only gradually induced into it under the influence of the laity (1974a:299).⁷⁹

However, if we examine the Pāli of the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta, we will notice that the word *sarīra* is used in a few different ways. The word *sarīra* (Skt *śarīra*) has two broad meanings: (1) the body (living or dead); (2) bodily remains (both bones or relics). The *Pali-English Dictionary* gives all these senses:

- (1) **The (physical) body** (D 1:157; M 1:157; S 4:286; A 1:50, 2:41, 3:57 f, 323 f, 4:190; Sn 478, 584; Dh 151; Nm 181; J 1:394 (six blemishes), 2:31, 3:53 (~*mamsa*, flesh of the body); *antima, sarīra*, one who wears his last body, an Anāgāmin (Sn 624; S 1:210; Dh 400).
- (2) **A dead body, a corpse** (D 2:141, 164, 295 f; M 1:58, 3:91).
- (3) **The bones** (D 2:164, 296; M 1:58 f)
- (4) **Relics** (Vv 63, 32; VvA 269). In later works, the suffix **-dhātu** is added, ie *sarīrika, dhātu*, to denote “relics (of the Buddha)” (VvA 165, 269; Mahv 13, 167).

The Thai language traditionally distinguishes between “sa.rii.ra.kaai” (*sarīra, kāya*), the physical body, and “sa.rii.ra.thaat” (*sarīra, dhātu*) or “sa.rii.ri.ka.thaat” (*sarīrika, dhātu*), the relics, but *sa.rii.ra* itself refers to “the body,” never to “relics.” However, in Pali, as is evident from the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta narrative, the word *sarīra*, depending on text (grammar) and context, shifts in meaning between “body” and “relics.”

In the accusative plural, *sarīre*, can refer either to the bodily remains [§5.10 f], and obliquely to “body” as in rituals concerning the body or “funeral rites” (*sarīra, pūjā*) [§5.10], or to “relics,” as in “Then a stupa should be built over the relics...” [§5.11.2]. The accusative singular (*sarīram*), however, refers to the body (both living and dead), but at §5.11b it specifically means “dead body” or “remains.”⁸⁰

⁷³ “Burial *ad sanctos* and the physical presence of the Buddha in early Indian Buddhism,” 1987.

⁷⁴ For a discussion on this notion, see this Intro §9.6 below.

⁷⁵ Trainor discusses Mus’ approach in 1997:38-39 & 96-135 (ch 4).

⁷⁶ Bulletin de l’Ecole Française de l’Extrême-Orient 61 1974a:275-299.

⁷⁷ Lit “body worship,” but I have left this term untranslated here in keeping with the discussion involved here.

⁷⁸ See Trainor 1997:55 n98 where he qu examples: TO Ling 1973:167-167; A Hirakawa (who developed a complex argument linking the practice of stupa veneration and relic cult with the rise of Mahāyāna) 1963:37-106; Ency of Rel (1987) 14:92-96. Schopen however has persuasively argued, from an analysis of some early Mahāyāna texts, against Hirakawa. Schopen concludes that the institutional rise of Mahāyāna was closely linked with the cult of the book (“The Phrase,” 1975: 180 f).

⁷⁹ For a summary of Bareau’s view, see Trainor 1997:53 f.

⁸⁰ K R Norman, in his “Notes on the Ahaurā version of Aśoka’s First Minor Rock Edict” (1983), qu Böhtlingk & Roth, *Sanskrit Wörterbuch*, sv *śarīra*, is aware that “in Sanskrit *śarīra* in the singular means ‘body,’ not ‘relics,’ which is its

It should be noted firstly that the word *dhātu* (meaning “relic”) does not appear in the Mahā Parinibbāna or anywhere else in the Pali Canon. Secondly, the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta states in the briefest way, apparently by way of afterthought, how the Buddha’s relics (*sarīra*) are distributed amongst the kshatriyas and the erection of stupas over them.

Even the Dīgha Commentary admits that the story of the relics and the construction of the ten stupas were added by *saṅgīti,kārā* (council fathers) simply to indicate that this occurred in India (DA 2:611, 615). The “council fathers” (*saṅgīti,kārā*) here refer to the council fathers or elder monks in Sri Lanka, such as those responsible for the writing down of the Pali Canon at the Alu, vihāra in Matulā Janapada (ie the Āloka Vihāra near Matale, about 23 km (14 mi) north of Kandy, in the Central Province).⁸¹

Some stanzas of the relic account at the end of the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta [§§6.27-28]⁸² is also found in **the Buddha,vaṃsa**, which has a whole chapter of 13 stanzas⁸³ on the relic distribution. The Buddha,vaṃsa goes on to relate in some detail how the relics and other requisites of the Buddha are distributed. **Oliver Abeynayake** makes this observation:

If the story of relics was added to the *Mahāparinibbāna sutta* during the time of the Third Council as the Commentary clearly points out, the Buddhavaṃsa story was added to it very much later. What is said in the *Sumaṅgalavilāsinī* regarding the stanzas found at the end of the *Mahāparinibbāna sutta* can be easily applied to the stanzas of the last chapter of the *Buddhavaṃsa*. This chapter was obviously a fabrication of Sri Lankan monks who lived after the time of the Commentary, *Madhuratthavilāsinī* [Buddha,vaṃsa Comy]. This explains why these stanzas are not commented on in the *Madhuratthavilāsinī*. The story of relics was the most popular subject amongst the Buddhists as a later stage. This was enlarged and embellished by adding new information according to the wishes of the learned monks and according to the needs of the various countries. In Burma, the last chapter of the *Buddhavaṃsa* was extended by adding some more stanzas! They are not found in the Sri Lankan manuscripts.

(Abeynayake 1984:194)⁸⁴

7.4.2 Scholars on relics and stupas

7.4.2.1 **Gregory Schopen** argues that the *sarīra,pūja* instruction [§5.10] applies only to Ānanda, not to all monastics, and that *sarīra,pūja* in this passage does not refer to “cult activity directed towards relics or reliquaries,” but to “funeral ceremonies” that took place between the time of death, and the cremation and the stupa-construction (1991:189=1997:101). Schopen states, but without total certainty, that the Sanskrit version of Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta (49.16)—which states that Mahā Kāśyapa was a monk of the highest standing, one of only four *mahā sthvirā* alive at that time, and in monastic terms, one “rich and famous”⁸⁵—“may be suggesting that participation in that part of monastic funerals known as *sarīra-pūjā* was—in, at least, important funerals—the prerogative of advanced monks of high status” (1991:195=1997:107 f). Ānanda, at that time, still a learner (namely, a streamwinner).

7.4.2.2 **An Yang-Gyu**, on the other hand, rebuts Schopen by arguing that the laity—such as kshatriyas, brahmins and householders—are expected to take an active part on the funeral arrangements [§5.10]. Further-

meaning in the plural” (1983:278 = 1991:252). However, as clear from above [§5.11], it should also be noted that *sarīre* (acc pl) can tr either as “relics,” or as “bodily remains (or body),” depending on the context. See also Schopen, “Monks and the relic cult,” 1991c:191 f, for which summary, see Trainor 1997:55 f.

⁸¹ On the writing down of the Pali Canon in Sri Lanka, see EW Adikaram, *Early History of Buddhism in Ceylon*, 1946:79.

⁸² D 16,6.27-28/2:164-167; see also D:RD 2:190 n1; Jtkm 37; *Epochs of the Conqueror* (Jina,kāla,mālī tr Jayawickrama) [Jinak] 1968:53. See B:H 98 n1 for other refs.

⁸³ B ch 28, which is not commented on in BA (Madhur’attha,vilāsinī), showing that the chapter was a later addition. IB Horner makes no note of this fact in her B:H (tr of Buddha,vaṃsa) and BA:H (tr of Buddha,vaṃsa Comy).

⁸⁴ On “reverence to relics,” see Oliver Abeynayake 1984:192-196.

⁸⁵ Ironically, in the Pali texts, Mahā Kassapa is represented as “a man of the four quarters,” ie one who is contented wherever he is, and is a model of as disciplined and austere wandering forest meditator. The Buddha declared him to be the foremost of those monks who observed the austere rules (*dhūtaṅga,dhara*, A 1:23; S 2:155). One of his Thera,gāthā says: “Taking whatever scraps one finds as food, fermented urine as medicine, | The foot of a tree as lodging, a dust-heap rag as robe— | For whom these suffice, truly he is a man of the four quarters” (Tha 1057). He is also a spiritual patron of the unfortunate and poor (U 30 f). See Ray 1994:146 n52 & Piya Tan, *The Buddha and His Disciples*, Singapore, 2004, ch 6 “The Buddha’s image and shadow.”

more, other versions of the Mahā,parinirvāṇa Sūtra agree with the Pali version in excluding all monks from such tasks (2002a:161). One Chinese version even says that Ānanda arranges for nuns and laywomen to worship the Buddha's body first because he thinks they were weak, and adds that everyone, monastic and lay, worships the Buddha's body before his cremation (T1.206c27). As such, it is clear that the funeral rites (whether it means preparing the body or worshipping the body) is not a "prerogative of advanced, high status monks" as Schopen claims. An Yang-Gyu convincingly explains the real situation:

Kassapa's sarira-pūjā, I think, is an attempt to justify Kassapa's succeeding the Buddha. According Sk[t] (428 49.14), Ti[b] (Rockhill 144) and M[ū]lasarvāstivāda] (T 401b15), when Kassapa arrives at the place of cremation at Kusinārā, he opens the iron coffin, removes the corpse of the Buddha from its wrappings, and pays his respects to the Buddha. Then he wraps the corpse in cloth afresh. This account is peculiar, for we do not immediately see why Kassapa makes such efforts to unravel and then re-wrap the corpse.

This process may be understood best when we compare it with what happened after the death of King Daśaratha in the Rāmāyana. The corpse of the king was kept in a vat of oil [oil-vat?] for seven days until his heir, Bharata, came. When Bharata arrived, he performed the obsequies for his father. Waldschmidt interprets that Kassapa performed an analogous procedure for the corpse of the Buddha (Waldschmidt 1944-48:344 f). As Bharata, the heir, conducts the funeral ceremony, so Kassapa, as an heir of the Buddha, is made to play the same role in succeeding the Buddha.

All these three versions belong to one and the same school, namely, the Mūlasarvāstivādin... which most explicitly states that Kassapa is the successor to the Buddha...(Ray 1994:108).⁸⁶

(An Yang-Gyu 2002a:162)

7.4.2.3 Schopen's purpose in arguing that the *sarira,pūja* instruction [§5.10] applies only to Ānanda, not to all monastics, and that it refers to "funeral ceremonies," is aimed at interpreting this instruction as allowing monks to participate in stupa worship, a pattern he sees in his archaeological fieldwork of monastic, stupa and ethnographic remains.⁸⁷ He is trying to fit his square peg of fancy into the round hole of truth.

However, the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta makes no any mention of monks or nuns worshipping relics. Only the laity is mentioned as doing all the funerary preparations. The Mallas of Kusinārā conduct the funerary rites for six days [§6.13]. On the seventh day, Ānanda merely repeats to them what the Buddha has instructed him [§6.-17]. The ensuing dispute over Buddha's relics arise between the Mallas and seven other parties. It is striking that not a single monk is involved in the relics dispute, which is resolved by a brahmin [§§6.24-26]. The relic recipients then each build a stupa in their own countries and hold festivities to celebrate the occasion.

7.4.2.4 The monks, on the their part, go on to gather for the first Buddhist council at Rājagaha to recite the Dharma and Vinaya.⁸⁸ Furthermore, while it is true that nowhere in the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta is it said that monastics are prohibited from worshipping stupas, "it is nevertheless true that the text does not portray stūpa worship as standing at the centre of their religious life" (Ray 1994:359). The Fourth Book of **the Milinda,pañha** clearly states that renunciants are not to be involved in stupa worship:

This is not the work of the Conqueror's sons [the monks], that is to say, worship. Rather this is what the Conqueror's sons should do, that is to say, the utter comprehension of karma-formations, wholesome attention, the contemplation of the 4 focuses of mindfulness, grasping the essence of mental objects of meditation, battling against the defilements, devotion to the spiritual goal. It is by the rest, gods and humans, that worship is to be done. Therefore, maharajah, The Tathāgata thinking, "Do not engage yourself in what does not concern you [what is not your work]; engage in these tasks," says, "Do not

⁸⁶ According to Przyluski, the tradition of placing Kassapa at the head of the order is late one (1926-28:303). The early tradition regards **Aññata Koṇḍañña** as the seniormost of the order members (*rattaññū*, A 1:23) (see Ray 1994:118). Since the Buddha refuses to appoint a successor, the later monastics attempt to appoint an heir after his passing. See An Yang-Gyu 2002a:162 n5.

⁸⁷ See eg his article, "Two problems in the history of Indian Buddhism: The layman/monk distinction and the doctrines of the transference of merit," 1985:9-47 = 1997:23-55. Unfortunately, he is trying to impose the findings of his fieldwork on post-Buddha situations upon the scriptural tradition of early Buddhism. Although his analyses may reflect certain monastic and lay lifestyles amongst the post-Buddha Indian Buddhists, there are no remains or artifacts from the Buddha's times extant today that support his notion of the prevalence of relic and stupa worship amongst the monastics of those times. In this case, Schopen's assertion, interesting as they are, would be like doing a study of the campus and students of the University of California at Berkeley, and claiming that they are also identical to those of Oxford University in England.

⁸⁸ See T402c5 (Mūlasarvāstivāda), T207c10, T190c19, all of which go on to describe the council.

worry yourselves about the funeral rites, Ānanda.”⁸⁹ If the Tathāgata had not spoken thus, maharajah, the monks would have been obsessed with his robe and bowl,⁹⁰ and would have worshipped the Buddha himself.⁹¹ (Miln 177-179)

Schopen⁹² discusses this passage at length and charges that “the *Milindapañha* here evidently represents a revisionist tendency within Pāli commentarial tradition and reflects the growing view that worship of the stūpa is not something in which the ideal monastic should engage” (Ray 1994:351).

7.4.2.5 Schopen, in his “The stūpa cult and the extant Pali Vinaya,”⁹³ presents what he regards as evidence showing that the absence of references to stupa worship in the Vinaya may be a later development “the fact that they are no longer found in the *Vinaya* known to us could, apparently, only be explained by assuming that either they had inadvertently dropped out of the manuscripts or, perhaps, were intentionally written out” (1989:93). At the end of his paper, Schopen says:

If the interpretation presented here is correct, and if the Pāli *Vinaya*, like all the *vinayas*, has such rules, and they were removed at a comparatively recent date. If this interpretation is not correct, and if the Pāli *Vinaya* did not contain such rules, then it either could not have been the *Vinaya* which governed early Buddhist monastic communities in India, or it presents a very incomplete picture of early and actual monastic behaviour and has, therefore, little historical value as a witness for what we know actually occurred on a large scale at all of the earlier monastic sites in India that we have some knowledge of. The whole question clearly deserves further consideration. (Schopen 1989:100 = 1997:94)

Schopen’s paper is clearly speculative, even desperately wishful, as most of his arguments are tenuous (like quoting the Mahā Parākrāmabāhu Kaṭikāvata outside of its ancient Lankan context). Understandably, his paper met with a massive rebuttal from various well known scholars all expressing doubts, especially on the specific point that rules regarding stupas were consciously and systematically removed from the extant Pali Vinaya.⁹⁴ Gombrich, for example, colourfully and rightly charges Schopen for “Making mountains without molehills” (1991)!

7.4.3 Stupa. Trainor errs in claiming that “the term *thūpa* appears to be reserved for a monument enshrining corporeal remains [D 2:141 f].”⁹⁵ There is no evidence from the Nikāyas—certainly not in the Mahā Parinibbana Sutta—that all **stupas** contain relics. As clearly evident from **the section on the 4 holy places** [§5.8]—referred to at D 2:141 f by Trainor—the stupas at the first three places commemorate living acts of the Buddha (his birth, awakening and teaching of the first discourse); only the last stupa perhaps will qualify as a **caitya** (a shrine with relics), technically speaking. In other words, while some stupas are reliquary cairns, others are commemorative shrines (*uddesika cetiya*).

The Buddha’s statement here with regards to the erecting of a stupa “for the Tathāgata” or “of the Tathāgata” (*Tathāgatassa thūpo*) is instructive:

Ānanda, just as one treats the remains of a wheel-turning king, even so, one should treat the remains of the Tathāgata. Then a stupa [cairn or burial mound] should be built for the Tathāgata at the crossroads [where four highways meet].⁹⁶ (D 16,5.11.3/2:142)

⁸⁹ D 16,5.10.

⁹⁰ The worship of the Buddha’s bowl did in fact develop and Faxian (c 400 CE) records as having seen it at Peshawar (Northwest Frontier Province, Pakistan) (see Miln:RD 1:248 n1).

⁹¹ *Mahārāja, akammaṃ h’etaṃ jina, puttānaṃ yadidaṃ pūjā, sammāsanaṃ saṅkhārānaṃ, yoniso manasikāro, sati-paṭṭhānānupassanā, ārammaṇa, sāra-g, gāho, kilesa, yuddhaṃ, sadattham anuyūñjanā, etaṃ jina, puttānaṃ karaṇīyaṃ, avasesānaṃ devamanussānaṃ pūjā karaṇīyā, tasmā, mahā, rāja, tathāgato “mā ime akamme yuñjantu, kamme ime yuñjantū” ti āha “abyāvaṭā tumhe, Ānanda, hotha tathāgatassa sarīra, pūjāyā” ti. Yad’etaṃ, mahā, rāja, tathāgato na bhāṇeyya, patta, cīvaram pi attano pariyādāpetvā bhikkhū Buddha, pūjaṃ y’eva kareyyun’ti.*

⁹² 1991b:195 f = 1997:108.

⁹³ 1989:83-100 = 1997:86-98.

⁹⁴ See eg Gombrich 1991, Hallisey 1991, and Hinüber 1991. For an interesting discussion on who were those involved in stupa worship in ancient India, see Ray, *Buddhist Saints in India*, 1994:339-352.

⁹⁵ See prev subsection 7.3.

⁹⁶ *Cātum, mahā, pathe Tathāgatassa thūpaṃ karonti.*

It is interesting to note here that neither *sarīraṃ* nor *sarīre* is mentioned: “Then a stupa [cairn or burial mound] should be built for the Tathāgata (*Tathāgatassa*) at the crossroads [where four highways meet].” Similarly in the preceding paragraph [§5.11b] in reference to the wheel-turning king, neither *sarīraṃ* nor *sarīre* is mentioned: “Then a stupa [cairn or burial mound] should be built for the wheel-turning king (*rañño cakkavattissa*) at the crossroads [where four highways meet].” This silence may suggest that the Buddha is not particularly concerned that the relics should be interred in the stupa. However, this is perhaps an argument from silence.

Moreover, the notion of enshrinement of relics is after the fact: there is no sanction anywhere in the Nikāyas by the Buddha, allowing for such a practice. At best we can say that relic worship and stupa cults are a post-Buddha practice popular amongst the Buddhists. As we have noticed earlier, the Buddha only says that “a stupa [cairn or burial mound] should be built for the Tathāgata at the crossroads [where four highroads meet].”⁹⁷ Except for mention of the claimants of the Buddha’s relics proposing to build stupas over relics, such as the “relic distribution” episode at the end of the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta [§§6.24-28], **there is clearly no endorsement of relic worship at all in the early Pali Canon.**⁹⁸

While some stupas may contain relics of the Buddha, of the saints, or of revered individuals, this is not the rule. If relics are such valuable artifacts, it will clearly be unsafe to deposit them in open-air structures like a stupa.⁹⁹ In fact, well known relics such as the “tooth relic,” the Sihalese palladium, are enshrined safely within the walls of the relic chamber (“dagoba” from *dhātu, garbha*) or relic house (*dhātu, ghara*).¹⁰⁰

Furthermore, as Bareau has shown, the Theravāda Vinaya is conspicuous in its lack of rules regarding the stupa cult. Both Bareau (“La Construction,” 1962:229) and Roth (“Symbolism of the Buddhist Stupa,” 1980: 185 f) argue that the absence of any rules concerning stupa worship in the Theravāda Vinaya reflects monastic opposition to the practice within that school. However, as Trainor notes, “While this absence is striking, it hardly provides a sufficient basis for concluding that members of the Theravāda saṅgha did not participate in relic veneration” (1997:56). In fact, Trainor discusses compelling evidence that relic worship was well established in Sri Lanka by the 2nd century BCE¹⁰¹—and the Vinaya rules concerning stupa worship were added to non-Theravāda schools (such as the Mūlasarvāstivāda) no earlier than that period.¹⁰²

7.4.4 Worship and the laity

7.4.4.1 The point remains that no one has conclusively shown that the Buddha, *as a rule*, allows relic worship or stupa worship. Not only is there no mention in the Nikāyas of relics being interred in stupas, even this statement of the Buddha, only shows that he *tolerates* external expression of devotion at such places, mainly because they were already in vogue in his time.

And they who offer a garland, scent, or perfume powder, or bow down there [at the stupa for a wheel-turning king or for a Buddha], or brighten their minds with faith¹⁰³ there, it will be for their profit and welfare for a long time to come
(D 5,11.2+3/2:142)

It is, of course, possible that this passage was interpolated at a later time. What the later monastics and laity practised by way of the stupa cult and relic worship do not discount what the Buddha himself clearly teaches, that is, one should know the difference between his teaching and his tolerance.

7.4.4.2 Bareau’s notion that the monks at first had nothing to do with the external worship, which were only gradually induced into it under the influence of the laity (1974a:299), is clearly still correct. **Schopen’s** ideas¹⁰⁴ only prove **Bareau** correct in showing that *after* the Buddha, stupa and relic cults were popular with Indian Buddhists. The Theravāda reservation about the stupa cult and relic worship apparently has been maintained

⁹⁷ D 16,5.11c/2:142.

⁹⁸ For a different opinion, see Schopen 1991c & Trainor 1997:45-54.

⁹⁹ On relic theft, see K Trainor, “When Is a Theft Not a Theft? Relic Theft and the Cult of the Buddha’s Relics in Sri Lanka.” *Numen* 39,1 (1992):1-26.

¹⁰⁰ SnA mentions such a structure: *Manussa tassa bhagavato ekaṃ y’eva dhātu, gharam katvā cetiyam patiṭṭhāpesum yojanam ubbedham ca parikkhepena ca* ([After the parinirvana of Kassapa Buddha,] the people built a relic house, a yojana high and in circumference, and installed a shrine for Blessed One” (SnA 1:194).

¹⁰¹ See Trainor 1997: ch 3.

¹⁰² On relic worship in India (after the Buddha), see Trainor 1997:57-65. On the accommodation of stupas into monasteries, see An Yang-Gyu 2002a:165-170.

¹⁰³ On faith, §5.8c n in this Sutta.

¹⁰⁴ See Schopen 1997, esp “Monks and the relic cult in the *Mahāparinibbāna-sutta*” (1991:187-201 = 1997:99-113). See also prec n.

from the Buddha's time until today. The deeply entrenched tensions between the monastic and the lay, between the stupa and the monastery, have been observed by various modern scholars.

7.4.4.3 **A W Sadler**¹⁰⁵ has explored these tensions in the Burmese situation, and observes that “so clearly significant [a] dichotomy between two lifestyles (lay and monastic) and the two religious goals (*dathana* and [monastic] discipline)” (1970:284). On the one hand, there is the Buddhism of the laity, bound up with darshan (seeing) and the stupa; and, on the other, the Buddhism of the monastic sangha, based on the Vinaya. Then there is the territorial separation of stupa and monastery. The Kyaik Ka Loke pagoda and monastery is typical: the pagoda complex stands on high ground, whereas the monastic complex is built on lower ground (id).¹⁰⁶

7.4.4.4 Despite this apparent tension and separation between stupa and monastery, there are no hard and fast rules that prevent any monastic from stupa worship or dedication of merit to relatives. Such show of piety is more commonly seen amongst the urban monastics than amongst the forest traditions. Stupa worship, as such, is more common in a monastic system that plays a significant role in the society's education and economics. This clearly in the case of Thailand where short-term ordination is common and monasteries serve as an alternative to national service in the army, and where the less fortunate are absorbed into the monastic system as monks and provided with a systematic education and economic support. However, these are all post-Buddha developments.

7.4.4.5 Any discussion of the stupa and relic cults should be done in the light of the Buddha exhortation on **the supreme worship** [7.2], after the supernatural manifestations of the sal trees fruiting and flowering out of season, heavenly flowers and sandalwood falling, and sounds of heavenly music and singing in homage of the Buddha:

But, Ānanda, this is not the way to honour, respect, revere, worship, or esteem the Tathāgata. Ānanda, whatever monk, nun, layman or laywoman¹⁰⁷ practises the Dharma in accordance with the Dharma, properly practising, living in accordance with Dharma, he honours the Tathāgata, respects him, reveres him, worships him with **the supreme worship**. Therefore, Ānanda, consider thus:

“We will practise the Dharma in accordance with the Dharma, properly practising, dwelling in accordance with the Dharma!”—this is how you should train yourself. (D 16,5.3.2/2:138)

7.5 SEEING THE BUDDHA

7.5.1 Darshan. The abstract noun *dassana*¹⁰⁸ (Skt *darśana*), “seeing, sight, vision”—which I have translated as a loan word, “**darshan**”¹⁰⁹—appears a total of at least 12 times in the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta, all in chapter 5, the Kusinārā Chapter.¹¹⁰ This shows the importance and popularity of the practice of viewing a holy person such as the Buddha. I have used the modern Indian word “darshan” to reflect the original cultural and religious background that applies here. The ancient Indians who come to “see” the Buddha, do just that: they regard this mere gazing on a holy person to bring upon them great blessing, and also to be in the sight of a holy person is just as blessed.¹¹¹

The Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta contains two important passages relating to *dassana* as “seeing” a holy person, and where we can tease out a good understanding of the Buddha's teaching regarding it. The first passage is **the**

¹⁰⁵ Sadler, “Pagoda and monastery: Reflection on the social morphology of Burmese Buddhism,” 1970. Qu in Ray 1994: 351 f.

¹⁰⁶ This arrangement is the standard Theravada monastic layout, ie, the separation of the *Buddh'āvāsa* (the Buddha's quarters, ie sacred ground where the main shrine-hall and stupas are located) and the *Saṅgh'āvāsa* (the monastic quarters, ie residential area).

¹⁰⁷ Note here that this important exhortation on the “supreme worship” is addressed to all the four companies (monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen). However, there is evidence of a monastic-lay distinction here in Buddhaghosa's commentary: **see (7.2).**

¹⁰⁸ It comes from the verb *dassati* = *dakkhati*, *dakkhiti*, “he sees.”

¹⁰⁹ Webster's 3rd International Dictionary on **darshan**: “a blessing held by various Hindus to consist in the viewing of an eminent person (as a religious leader).” See Trainor 1997:177 f & McMahan 1998:10 (digital).

¹¹⁰ §§5.7×2, 5.15×5, 5.19, 5.20, 5.24, 5.24, 5.25.

¹¹¹ See *Pratyupanna-Buddha-Saṁmukha, vashīta-samādhi Sūtra* (tr Harrison, 1990) §14H. Lawrence Babb, “Glancing: Visual interaction in Hinduism,” 1981:396 f, has shown that Hindus not only wish to see their deities, but also wish to be seen by them.

Upavāṇa episode [§5.4 f] where the Buddha abruptly instructs Upavāṇa, who is fanning, to step aside. When asked by Ānanda, the Buddha replies that numerous devatas have assembled “for the sight of the Tathāgata” [§5.5]. The more worldly devatas lament: “Too soon will the Eye in the world disappear!” The second passage concerns the four holy places, of which the Buddha declares: “Ānanda, there are these four places that should be seen by the faithful son of family so as to rouse samvega [a sense of urgency]” [§5.8.1].¹¹²

This desire for “seeing” the Buddha¹¹³ is a popular subject of Sinhalese Buddhist hagiography. **The Mahāvamsa**, a Sinhalese hagiographical chronicle, and **the Samanta, pāsādikā**, Buddhaghosa’s Vinaya Commentary, mention attempts to legitimize relic worship. In chapter 17 of the Mahāvamsa, entitled *Dhātu Āgamano* (the Advent of the Relics)¹¹⁴ (Mahv 17.1-4), Mahinda (c282-222 BCE, said to be Aśoka’s son and brother of the nun Saṅgha, mittā)¹¹⁵ expresses to the Sinhala king Devānam, piya Tissa his desire to return to India to bring back some Buddha relics:

*Cira, diṭṭho hi sambuddho, satthā no manujādhipa
Anātha, vāsam avasimha, n’atthi no pūjyam idha.*

Long has it been since we last saw the Buddha, our Teacher, O lord of men:
We lived without a refuge, we have nothing worthy of worship here. (Mahv 17.2)

The sentiment of this stanza is elaborated in prose in the Samanta, pāsādikā, which further relates how the monk **Mahinda** then brings back relics (the Buddha’s right collar bone) from India which are then enshrined in the Thūpārāma¹¹⁶ (VA 1:82-86).

Since the early Pāli tradition is *oral*—and where “seeing” (*dassana*) is generally used in a figurative sense with “knowing” (*ñāṇa*)—the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta contains many **visual passages**.¹¹⁷ If we regard *listening* as the basic teaching and transmission method of early Buddhism (that is, from the Buddha’s time to just before Aśoka or 6th-3rd centuries BCE), then later Buddhism, especially the Mahāyāna texts¹¹⁸ is characterized by *seeing* or *vision*. Scholars have noted that hearing is associated with time and sequence (the ear hears sounds arising and passing away in time), while seeing is associated with space (the eye sees objects in space).¹¹⁹

Since words are always disappearing as soon as they are pronounced, **Walter Ong**¹²⁰ suggests that **orality** is essentially *dialogical* and that, in oral cultures, thought must be “shaped into mnemonic [mnemonic or memory-assisting] patterns ordered for oral recurrence” and consists of rhythmic and repetitive patterns and formulaic expressions” (1982:34). This is in fact how the early Pāli suttas are patterned and propagated.

Mahāyāna sutras, on the other hand, generally emphasize the visual, often using visually-oriented language and metaphor. Mahāyāna texts, like the Sukhāvātī Sūtras, reflect what are to be seen rather than heard.

The emergence of visionary literature is not confined to Mahāyāna Buddhism but is a pan-Indic phenomenon beginning around the first or second century BCE—the same time as the emergence of writing. Parts of the Bhagavadgita and the Pure Land texts are the most ready example of such visually oriented literature emerging around this period. It is also noteworthy that visualization practices became more elaborate and important in both Buddhism and Hinduism at this time.

(McMahan 1998:10 digital)¹²¹

¹¹² For a useful discussion, see Trainor 1997:174-176.

¹¹³ For a discussion on “seeing” and Sāriputta, see Trainor 1997:179-181; and of Vakkali, 1991:181-183.

¹¹⁴ It is noteworthy that the term *dhātu* is unknown in Mahā Parinibbāna S; instead, it speaks of *sarīra*. See 7d(1) above.

¹¹⁵ On Mahinda and Saṅgha, mittā, see Trainor 1997:84-87.

¹¹⁶ “Maharajah, it has been a long time since we last saw the fully self-awakened one. We have been living with a refuge... Maharajah, it has been a long time since we last saw the fully self-awakened one. We have had no opportunity for venerating, for rising in salutation to, for saluting with lotus-palms, for show proper homage. As such, we fell at a loss. (*Mahā, rāja, amhehi cira, diṭṭho sammā, sambuddho, anātha, vāsam vasimha... Cira, diṭṭho no mahā, rāja sammā, sambuddho, abhivādana, paccuṭṭhāna. añjali, kamma. samīci, kamma. karaṇa-ṭ, thānam n’atthi, ten’amha ukkaṇṭhitā ti*, VA 1:83).

¹¹⁷ §§3.2; 4; 4.25, 4.28, 4.37; 5.5, 5.9, 5.12, 5.16; 6.19, 6.24.

¹¹⁸ The Mahāyāna movement is believed to have arisen in India around the 2nd-1st cent BCE, ie just after Aśoka’s time, but the seeds are present even before that, as evident in our Mahā Parinibbāna S.

¹¹⁹ David Chidchester, *Word and Light: Seeing, hearing and religious discourse*. Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992:9. Qu by McMahan 1998:8 (digital) (qv).

¹²⁰ Walter J Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The technologizing of the word*. NY: Methuen, 1982; but see McMahan 1998 n30.

¹²¹ See also Paul Harrison, “Commemoration and identification in *Buddhānusmṛti*,” 1992 & “Buddhānusmṛti in the Pratyutpanna-buddha-saṁmukhāvasthitā-samādhi-sūtra,” 1978.

7.5.2 The eye in the world. In §5.6a of the sutta below, the Buddha is described as “**the eye in the world**,” *cakkhum loke*, or freely translated, “the Eye of the world.” The translation “the eye *in* the world”¹²² reflects that the Buddha appears *in* the world but is *not of* the world (spiritual, not worldly), ie one who sees amongst the blind of the world (MA 3:432 = SnA 2:463). The Buddha is also often described as “the one with the eyes” (*cakkhumā*), or as possessing “the 5 eyes” [§5.6a n]. A broader epithet here is *cakkhumā* (the one with the eyes, seeing one).¹²³

The Commentary on Vv 12.5 says: “The Buddha, Blessed One, is the one with the eyes because of the 5 eyes” (*pañcahi cakkhūhi cakkhumā buddho bhagavā*, VvA 60). **The Culla Niddesa** defines the 5 eyes (*pañca cakkhu*) as follows:

- (1) The physical eye (*mamsa, cakkhu*),
- (2) The divine eye (*dibba, cakkhu*) = *yathā, kamm’ūpaga, ñāṇa* or *cutūpapāta, ñāṇa*, the knowledge of how beings fare in life and death according to their karma;
- (3) The wisdom eye (*paññā, cakkhu*), ie the understanding of the 4 noble truths;
- (4) The Buddha eye (*Buddha, cakkhu*), ie the Buddha’s skill in understanding personality and dispositions especially in giving suitable and effective teachings;
- (5) The universal eye (*samanta, cakkhu*), omniscience, the full knowledge of reality.¹²⁴ (Nc 235)

7.6 SENSE OF URGENCY

7.6.1 Saṁvega is religious experience or spiritual emotion arising from the “seeing” of the Buddha, or some holy person, or event that gives us a vision of true reality, so that we are moved to spiritual effort to cultivate ourselves. The Mahā, parinibbāna Sutta describes visiting with faith the 4 holy places to be able to arouse such religious emotions [§5.7].

The Vimāna, vatthu Commentary defines *saṁvega* as “a knowing that is accompanied by moral fear”¹²⁵ (*saṁvego nāma sah’ottapam ñāṇam*, VvA 213). Essentially, “moral fear” is an “other-regarding” conduct moved by a fear, often healthy, of karmic repercussions and moral accountability.

The *Pali-English Dictionary* defines as “agitation, fear, anxiety; thrill, religious emotion (caused by contemplation of the miseries of the world).” It is called “spiritual emotion” in the sense that it moves one to seek a deeper level of self-understanding or one is profoundly moved by a direct vision of reality. It is one of the most powerful of Buddhist terms, and refers to a sort of spiritual crisis that results from directly perceiving the truth.

For a lay person, this usually results in disillusionment with worldly life, often leading to renunciation, whereas in the case of a monastic, it urges him to exert more energy in spiritual practice until the goal is attained. “A feeling of urgency,” *saṁvega*, ie an overpowering experience of awe or a religious experience that induces one to ask the deep questions of life and seek their answers. In view of such benefits, **the Somanassa Sutta** (It 37/29 f) declares:

SD 9(7.6)

Somanassa Sutta

The Discourse on Mental Ease | **It 37/29 f @ SD 16.14** (annotated)
 Traditional: It 2.1.10 Khuddaka Nikāya, Iti, vuttaka 2, Duka Nipāta 1, Paṭhama Vagga 10
 Theme: Saṁvega and its benefit

This was said by the Blessed One: I have heard it spoken by the Arhat [worthy one].¹²⁶

¹²² “**The eye in the world**,” *cakkhum loke*. See PED: cakkhu for citations. See Ency Bsm: cakkhu (Upali Karunaratna). Readings: (1) Jan Gonda, *The Vision of the Vedic Poets*. The Hague: Mouton, 1963 (esp 22); (2) Alex Wayman, “The Buddhist theory of vision” in *Añjali: A felicitation volume presented to Oliver Hector de Alwis Wijesekera*, Peradeniya: Univ of Ceylon, 1970:27-32, repr *Buddhist Insight: Essays by Alex Wayman*, ed George R Elder, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1984: 153-161 [classification of eyes in the Mahāyāna]; (3) K Trainor, *Relics, Ritual, and Representation in Buddhism*, 1997:175-179.

¹²³ V 1:16; D 1:76, 85, 100; S 1:27; S 1:121, 134, 159, 210; A 1:116, 124, 4:106; Dh 273; Sn 31, 160, 992, 1028, 1116, 1128; It 108, 115; Vv 12.5, 81.27.

¹²⁴ On the Buddha’s omniscience, see **Kaṇṇaka-t, thala S** (M 90/2:125-133), SD 10.8 (2) & **Sandaka S** (M 76), SD 35.7.

¹²⁵ On moral fear (*ottappa*), see SD 1.5 (4) & SD 2.5 (1).

“Bhikshus, possessed of two things, [30] even here and now a monk lives with great mental ease, wise in rousing effort,¹²⁷ for the destruction of the mental influxes.¹²⁸

What are the two things?

By feeling samvega [spiritual urgency] in those things that evoke samvega, and by rightly rousing effort in feeling samvega.¹²⁹

Bhikshus, possessed of two things, even here and now a monk lives with great mental ease, and being wise in rousing effort, for the destruction of the mental influxes.”

This is the meaning of what the Blessed One said. The meaning here is spoken thus:¹³⁰

In what evokes samvega, the wise feel samvega,
The exertive, masterful monk should consider¹³¹ it wisely.

Thus he dwells exerting himself, habitually at peace, not restless.
Yoked to mental calm, he will attain to suffering’s destruction.

This meaning too was spoken by the Blessed One. Thus I have heard.

— evaṃ —

7.6.2 The Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta (D 16) and **the Samvega Sutta** (A 4.118) list the 4 things or places (*thāna*) that arouse feelings of urgency (*samvejanīya-ṭ, thānā*) as:

- (1) the place of the Nativity (Lumbini Park, modern Rummidei);
- (2) the place of the Great Awakening (Uruvelā on the Nerañjarā river, modern Ureli on the Lilanja river);
- (3) the place of the First Discourse (the Deer Grove at Isipatana, modern Sahet-Mahet); and
- (4) the place of the Mahā Parinirvana (Kusināra, modern Kashgar) (D 16,5.8/2:140; A 4.118/2:120 f).

Buddhaghosa gives **the 8 occasions invoking urgency** (*aṭṭha samvega, vatthu*), as follows: birth (*jāti*), decay (*jarā*), illness (*vyādhi*), death (*marāṇa*), suffering of loss (*apāya, dukkha*), suffering of the past rooted in the round of rebirth (*atīte vaṭṭa, mūlaka dukkha*), suffering of the future rooted in the round of rebirth (*anāgate vaṭṭa, mūlaka dukkha*), and suffering of the present rooted in the search for food (*paccuppanne āhāra, pariyeṭṭhi, mūlaka dukkha*).¹³²

7.6.3 The *Buddhist Dictionary* defines *samvega* as “‘the sources of emotions’ or, of a sense of urgency” of which there are eight: “birth; old age; death; the suffering in the lower states of existence; the misery of the past rooted in the cycle of rebirth; the misery of the future rooted in the cycle of rebirth; and the misery of the present rooted in the search for food.”¹³³ As such, *samvega* would be¹³⁴ the kind of experience that the Bodhisattva Siddhattha had when he saw the four sights.¹³⁵

¹²⁶ This is spoken by the laywoman **Khujj’uttarā** in connection with teachings she heard from the Buddha at Kosambī. Sāmāvatī, chief queen of Udena, had instructed her to listen to the Buddha’s teaching and repeat them before her (Sāmāvatī) and her 500 women attendants at the palace. (ItA 24 ff). Also tr as SD 16.14 with Introd.

¹²⁷ *Yoniso āradhho*. Later, *yoniso padhānena* (see below in sutta).

¹²⁸ “**Mental influxes**,” *āsava*. See below §10d n.

¹²⁹ *Samvejanīyesu thānesu samvejanena samvegassa ca yoniso padhānena*.

¹³⁰ *Samvejanīyesu thānesu, samvijjethēva paṇḍito | ātāpī nipako bhikkhu, paññāya samavekkhiya || Evaṃ vihārī ātāppī, santa, vutti anuddhato | ceto, samatham anuyutto, khayam dukkhassa pāpuṇe ti ||*

¹³¹ *Samavekkhiya*, fr *samavekkhati*, “he considers” = *sam* (prefix denoting focus) + *ava* (down) + √IKṢ, to see; also *apekkhati*, he looks down up, ie, looks on (with equanimity). *Samavekkhati* here connotes both a constant mindful KhpA 235 = Vism 4.63/135ness of the 3 characteristics (impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and not-self) and the practice of meditation.

¹³² KhpA 235 = Vism 4.63/135; see also UA 2-5 :: UA:M 2-6.

¹³³ Vism 4.63 = KhA 235; D 3:124; S 1:197; A 1:43; It 30; J 1:138; Nm 406.

¹³⁴ On the 4 sights, see **Deva, dūta S** (M 130/3:178-187), SD 2.23 (2003), and **Ariya, pariyesanā S** (M 26.14/ 1:163), SD 1.11 (2003).

¹³⁵ See Piya Tan, *The Buddha and His Disciples*, 2004:2.3.

7.6.4 In the well known Buddha legend, when the Bodhisattva as a young prince saw **the 4 sights**, he was overcome by a powerful spiritual experience termed *samvega*.¹³⁶ A possible English rendition of the term is “fear and awe” although this expression is more applicable to a theistic belief-system than to a non-theistic one like Buddhism. The closest, albeit awkward, translation is perhaps “sense of urgency” or spiritual urgency. Tor-kel Brekke, in his book, *Religious Motivation and the Origins of Buddhism*, explains that

what makes this realization [the inherent suffering of life] so powerful in the case of the prince is the dissonance between his original cognition of his own life and this new knowledge that he himself must grow old, suffer and die...

This cognitive dissonance gives the prince a strong feeling of discomfort, which motivates him to equalize the discrepancy. Obviously the facts of life cannot be changed, and the only solution is to bring his own life into some sort of harmony with these facts. (Brekke, 2002:63)

The spiritual urgency experienced by the young Siddhattha was by no means unique. Many others in his time have left their homes in search of a higher liberating truth. These were the recluses or *śramaṇā* (Pali *samaṇā*) who, at the same time, found no affinity with the established priestly religion of the *brāhmaṇā* or brahmins.

7.6.5 The Canon provides a number of examples of samvega. **The Cūḷa Taṇhā,saṅkhaya Sutta** (M 37) records how Moggallāna roused a sense of urgency (for spiritual development) in Sakra, Vessavaṇa and the gods of the 33 by making the celestial Vejayanta Palace shake and tremble through his psychic powers (M 37,-11/1:254 f).

The Brahma,deva Sutta (S 6.3) relates how Brahmā Sahampati arouses samvega in Brahma,deva’s mother, by appearing before her and instructing her the proper way of making religious offerings.

The Vana Saṃyutta (ch 9 of the Saṃyutta Nikaya) consists of 14 suttas all dealing with the rousing of the sense of urgency for spiritual development (S 9/1:197-205).

In **the Mahā Hatthi,padôpama Sutta** (M 28), Sāriputta speaks of samvega in this manner:

Avusos, when that monk thus recollects the Buddha, thus recollects the Dharma, thus recollects the Sangha, if equanimity supported by the wholesome is not established in him, then he rouses a feeling of urgency thus:

‘It is a loss for me, it is no gain for me, it is bad for me, it is not good for me, that when I thus recollect the Buddha, thus recollect the Dharma, thus recollect the Sangha,¹³⁷ equanimity supported by the wholesome¹³⁸ is not established in me.’¹³⁹

Avusos, just as when a daughter-in-law sees a father-in-law, she rouses a sense of urgency (to please him), even so, when that monk thus recollects the Buddha, thus recollects the Dharma, thus recollects the Sangha, if equanimity supported by the wholesome is not established in him, then he rouses a feeling of urgency.

But, avusos, if when he thus recollects the Buddha, thus recollects the Dharma, thus recollects the Sangha, equanimity supported by the wholesome *is* established in him, then he joyfully approves of it. At that point, avusos, much has been done by the monk. (M 28,10/1:186 f)

¹³⁶ Like the growing number of Buddhist terms that are being anglicized (Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, nirvana, karma, sramana, samsara, etc), it is practical to use “samvega” as the English borrowing from the Pali/Sanskrit.

¹³⁷ For the stock passages on these three recollections, see **Mahā Parinibbāna S** (D 16,2.9/2:93) & **Dhaj’agga S** (S 11.3/1:219 f).

¹³⁸ “Equanimity supported by the wholesome” (*upekkhā kusala,nissitā*) is the equanimity of insight, the sixfold equanimity of neither attraction nor aversion towards agreeable and disagreeable objects that appear at the six sense-doors (MA 2:227). “Strictly speaking, the sixfold equanimity pertains only to the arahant, but is here ascribed to the monk in training because his insight approximates to the perfect equanimity of the arahant” (M:ÑB 1222 n337).

¹³⁹ Comy: **The recollection of the Buddha** is undertaken here by recalling that the Blessed One spoke this simile of the saw, and **the recollection of the Dharma** by recalling the advice given in the simile of the saw, and **the recollection of the Sangha** by the virtues of the monks who can endure such abuse without giving rise to a mind of hate. (MA 2:227)

We see here *samvega* expressed as a self-acknowledgement of spiritual lack and to work towards spiritual development.

7.6.6 A K Coomaraswamy's brief but instructive article on *samvega*,¹⁴⁰ is probably the first on the subject. He says that there are two aspects or phases of *samvega*: (1) the emotional “shock” that we have just noted, often through realizing the transient nature of things, and (2) a subsequent experience of peace transcending such emotions as fear or love, an experience related to the apprehension of truth. He defines *samvega* as follows:

a state of shock, agitation, fear, awe, wonder, or delight induced by some physically or mentally poignant experience. The shock is a consequence of the aesthetic surfaces of phenomena that may be liked or disliked as such. The complete experience transcends this condition of ‘irritability’. ...[M]ore than a merely physical shock is involved; the blow has a *meaning* for us, and the realization of that meaning, in which nothing of the physical sensation survives, is still a part of the shock. These two phases of the shock are, indeed, normally felt together as parts of an instant experience; but they can be logically distinguished... In the first phase, there is really a disturbance, in the second there is the experience of a peace that cannot be described as an emotion in the sense that fear and love or hate are emotions. (Coomaraswamy in Lipsey I 1977:182-184)

As an example of *samvega*, Coomaraswamy cites the story of **the elder Vakkali** who, on first meeting the Buddha, is captivated by the Buddha’s physical “beauty,” joins the order and spend his days gazing at the Buddha’s person. The Buddha, however, helps Vakkali overcome the “idolatrous experience” so that he does not become “attached” to the visual image—thus Vakkali makes the transition from shock to delight, and from delight to understanding.¹⁴¹

7.6.7 Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu, in his otherwise inspiring paper on *samvega*,¹⁴² unfortunately gives it rather narrow definition as “the oppressive sense of shock, dismay, and alienation.” This definition will be part of the first connotation—that of “emotional shock—in Coomaraswamy’s definition. Ṭhānissaro, however, insightfully points out that the young Siddhattha experiences “samvega” (he proposes we adopt this into the English vocabulary) when, according to popular Buddhist legend, Siddhattha sees the first three sights (an old man, a sick man, a dead man),¹⁴³ but on seeing the fourth sight (the recluse), experiences *pasada* [7h here], “clarity and serene confidence” (Ṭhānissaro) or “calm and clear heart of faith” (Piya Tan)—this is what “keeps samvega from turning into despair” (Ṭhānissaro 1998:3).¹⁴⁴

7.6.8 In noting the usage of *samvega* in the Mahā Paribbāna Sutta in connection with the 4 holy places, Coomaraswamy explains that such an experience suggests “the shock of conviction that only an intellectual art can deliver, the body-blow that is delivered by any perfect and therefore convincing statement of truth” (1942-43:179). In other words, notes Trainor,

they draw attention to the visual and emotional aspect of the experience of *samvega*, and they link it with the apprehension of truth, thus tying together the experience of seeing and knowing.

(Trainor 1997:176)

Trainor (1997:176) goes on to show this close connection between “seeing” and “knowing” in the Buddhist tradition, as in such canonical terms (quoted by Coomaraswamy) like

¹⁴⁰ “*Samvega*, ‘Aesthetic shock,’” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 7 1942-43:174-179. On **Nathan Katz**’s short discussion, see 1979:59-61.

¹⁴¹ See Roger Lipsey, ed. *Coomaraswamy. Selected Papers: Traditional Art and Symbolism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press (Bollingen Series 89), 1977:181.

¹⁴² Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu, “Affirming the truths of the heart: The Buddhist teachings on samvega and pasada” [1997]. High View, WV: Bhavana Society, 1998.

¹⁴³ See Piya Tan, *The Buddha and His Disciples*, 2004:2.3.

¹⁴⁴ On the advantages of the life of renunciation, Ṭhānissaro writes: “For people whose sense of samvega is so strong that they want to abandon any social ties that prevent them from following the path to the end of suffering, Buddhism offers both a long-proven body of wisdom for them to draw from, as well as a safety net: the monastic sangha, an institution that enables them to leave lay society without having to waste time worrying about basic survival. For those who can’t leave their social ties, Buddhist teaching offers a way to live in the world without being overcome by the world, following a life of generosity, virtue, and meditation to strengthen the noble qualities of the mind that will lead to the end of suffering.” (1998:4).

ehi,passika, “come and see” for oneself (D 2:93 = M 1:37; S 4:339; A 1:158; B 25.50);
ñāṇa,dassana, “knowledge and vision, knowing and seeing” that is used to describe the experience of fulling understanding the “nature of things as they really are” (*yathā,bhūtam*) (V 4:26, 195; S 5:423; A 3:19, 200; 4:99, 336, 5:2 f, 311 f; Pm 1:33, 43 f, 2:244; full discussion at DA 1:220).

For further discussion on samvega, see **Somanassa Sutta** (It 2.1.10) in SD 16.14.

7.7 BUDDHIST PILGRIMAGE. The relic cult [7.1] led to the construction of stupas [7c, 7d], which at once led to the rise of Buddhist pilgrimage. Pilgrims came from far and wide, not only from India itself but from far beyond. From the 4th through the 7th centuries, Buddhist scholars in China periodically realized that their Buddhist texts and notions were at often variance with their Indian antecedents. They tried to correct the problem either through the introduction of additional translations or by clarifying differences between Buddhist and native Chinese ideas.

The early Chinese masters like Dao’an (312-385) and Sheng’yu (445-518) were aware of the profusion of inauthentic texts. They composed Chinese catalogues of Buddhist works¹⁴⁵ “in large part precisely for the purpose of separating the dragons from the snakes and the jewels from the stones.”¹⁴⁶ Most of the early translators of Buddhist texts were Central Asian or Indian monks, like Kumāra,jīva, who has taken the original sutras in China and translated them in order to transmit Buddhism to the Chinese.

At the end of the 4th century, there began an important new development: Chinese monks themselves travelled all the way to India to retrieve the Buddhist texts. The best known of these pilgrims were **Faxian** 法顯 (401-414), **Xuanzang** 玄奘 (629-645) and **Yijing** 義淨 (671-695) who made valuable records of their travels:

Faxian *Record of the Buddhist Kingdoms* 佛國記 (India at the beginning of the 5th cent).
 Xuanzang *Record of the Western Regions* 大唐西域記 (Central Asia and India in the mid-7th cent).
 Yijing *Record of the Buddhist Kingdoms in the Southern Archipelago* 南海寄歸內法傳 (SE Asia and India in the late 7th century).

In 629, during the Tang dynasty, the young and charismatic monk, **Xuanzang** 玄奘 (ca 596-664),¹⁴⁷ the most famous and successful of the Chinese pilgrims, secretly left China for India. His purpose was “to gaze on the sacred traces [relics], and earnestly to seek the law,”¹⁴⁸ that is, to bring back Sutras to China so that the truth teaching would prevail. His 16 years of travels (629-645) are recorded in the **Xiyuji**¹⁴⁹ and immortalized in Chinese mythology as the **Xiyouji**.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁵ Dao’an 道安 composed his catalogue in 374, Seng’you 僧祐 in 515 and Zhisheng 智昇 in 730.

¹⁴⁶ Makita Tairyō 牧田諦亮. Gikyou kenkyū 疑經研究 (Studies on Apocryphal Sutras). Kyoto: Jimbun kagaku kenkyūsho, 1976:99. Quoted by Charles Muller, “East Asian Apocryphal Scriptures: Their origins and role in the development of Sinitic Buddhism,” http://www.tyg.jp/tgu/school_guidance/bulletin/k6.acmuller/acmuller.htm 2004:1.

¹⁴⁷ On Xuanzang and other Chinese pilgrims, see Piya Tan, “Buddhism in China” §§14-19 in *History of Buddhism*, Singapore, rev ed 2004. See also Sally Hovey Wriggins, *Xuanzang: A Buddhist Pilgrim on the Silk Road*, Boulder, CO: West View Press, 1996.

¹⁴⁸ Shamu Hwui Li [Huilī], *The Life of Hiuen-Tsiang* [Datang Dacu’ensi Sanzang Fashi Juan, T50.2053], tr Samuel Beal. London: Kegan, Paul, 1911:44. Hui Li (completed by Yan Cong). Abr Eng tr **Li Yongxi**, *The Life of Hsuan tsang: The Tripitaka-Master of the Great Tzu En Monastery*, Peking: Chinese Buddhist Association, 1959. This contemporary biography of Xuanzang covers his childhood, studies, travel to India and events until his death. The last four fascicles were completed by **Yan Cong** (and others) after Hui Li’s death. A few sections are omitted in this otherwise fine tr Li’s reconstruction of Sanskrit names, however, are not always accurate. First half also tr in **Samuel Beal**, *The Life of Hiuen-Tsiang*. Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1973 (repr of 1911 Kegan Paul ed.)

¹⁴⁹ The Tang emperor Taizong [T’ai Tsung] (r 626-649), impressed by Xuanzang’s knowledge and character, urged him to leave the monkhood and accept a ministerial post. Xuanzang refused and was keen to translate the sutras he had brought back. The emperor, eager to learn from Xuanzang, constantly interrupted him to ask him about the western countries. Xuanzang might have written the **Record of the Western Regions** (大唐西域記 Datang Xiyouji) (containing descriptions of over 130 countries) and presented it to the emperor to prevent further interruptions! This work has been tr as *Si-yu-ki* [Xiyuji]: *Buddhist Records of the Western World*, London: Kegan, Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co, 1884; pt 1 is Faxian’s travel records, Fogouji 佛國記.

¹⁵⁰ Partially tr by **Arthur Waley** as *Monkey: Folk Novel of China*, NY: Evergreen, 1958: delightful reading. As a companion to this, Waley wrote *The Real Tripitaka*, NY: Macmillan, 1952, an enjoyable account of Xuanzang’s life, with much <http://dharmafarer.org>

The veneration of the “traces” of the Buddha and his disciples was (and is) for the most part a very unstructured activity.

It consisted largely of various levels of prostration and as series of conventionalized gifts: flowers, incense, colored powders, perfumes and unguents, banners and bits of cloth, parasols, and occasionally, although rarely, cooked meatless food. Little has been recorded in the way of verbal formulae; offerings might be accompanied by a vow declaring the desired application of merit originating from the gift. More elaborate acts, also optional, might include decorating a site or monuments with lamps, hiring musicians to play on the premises, sweeping the environs of a shrine. Both Hsüan Tsang [Xuanzang] and in the Pali Mahāvamsa describe royal rituals in which relics were placed for a brief time over a king’s head; the Chinese pilgrim also saw them placed upon a throne. The majority of these actions represent conventionalized gestures of honor and submission; they have been identified as such both within the Buddhist tradition itself and within the greater Indian [south and south-east Asian] culture from which Buddhism freely adopted them. (Nancy Falk, “To gaze on the sacred traces,” 1977:287 f)

Despite the idiosyncrasies of the pilgrims at these ancient sacred sites, there is one behaviour common to all of them, that is, **the rightwise circumambulation** (*pradakṣiṇa*, P *padakkhiṇa*)¹⁵¹ around the sacred person, object, or place. This transformative aspect of the Buddhist pilgrimage has been specially studied by Paul Mus in his *Barabudur*.¹⁵² Nancy Falk notes that “[s]imilarly, although again this could be accidental, the original Buddhist tour of the ‘Four Great Miracle’ sites would have proceeded in a rightwise direction” (1977:289) and in her footnote, she says “From the site of the Buddha’s birth, Lumbinī, in northern Bihar; southeast to Bodh Gayā, the place of enlightenment; northwest to Kusināgara, place of the *parinirvāna*” (op cit n26).

The 4 holy places have been mentioned earlier [7c]. We shall now look at them again with regards to Buddhist pilgrimage. In this connection, the Buddha speaks of the benefits of pilgrimage to the four holy places [§5.8.1-2]: a faithful “son of family” (*kula,putta*), faithful “monks and nuns, laymen and laywomen” should reflect in the following manner:

“Here the Tathāgata was born,”

“Here the Tathāgata attained supreme awakening,”

“Here the Tathāgata turned the Wheel of the Dharma,”

“Here the Tathāgata attained the nirvana-element without residue,”

Anyone who dies with a calm and bright heart of faith¹⁵³ while making a pilgrimage of these shrines, at the breaking up of the body after death, will be reborn in a happy state, a heavenly world.

(D 16,5.8.1-2/2:140 f)

Three points are of interest here: the pilgrim, the act of pilgrimage and the benefits of pilgrimage. **The Buddhist pilgrim** addressed first by the Buddha is the “son of family” (*kula,putta*) [§5.8.1]. Then follows the paragraph exhorting the fourfold assemblies—the monks, the nuns, the laymen and the laywomen—as pilgrims. For the young to be addressed first and separately is significant. **The Samaya Sutta** (A 3:65-67) speaks of the “5 right times for striving,” that is, the ideal conditions for spiritual practice:

1. When one is young.
2. When one is healthy and fit.
3. When there is no difficult in finding food.
4. When there is social harmony and fellowship.

information not available elsewhere in English. **Anthony Yu**, *The Journey to the West*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977-83, 4 vols: an unabridged translation, not as exciting as Waley’s version, but is more literally faithful to the original, giving a broader account of Chinese views and attitudes.

¹⁵¹ *Padakkhiṇa* = *pa* (directional prefix) + *dakkhiṇa* (right), ie, keeping one’s right to the sacred person or object; alt trs “clockwise, sunwise.”

¹⁵² **Paul Mus**, *Barabudur: Sketch of a History of Buddhism based on Archaeological Criticism of the Texts*. [French, *Barabudur*, 2 vols, Hanoi, 1935, repr 1 vol, 1978] Eng tr Alexander W Macdonald, 1998, xxvii, 354pp, 14 plates, col illus, index hb. “Mus’s *Barabudur* is primarily a study of the *stūpa* form and symbolism, with emphasis on the monument’s continuity with the brahmanic fire altar. He viewed the monument itself, together with the altar, as an attempt to break through the barriers of time and space. In this sense, its symbolism complements and is complemented by that of the ritual *pradakṣiṇā* that was such a constant feature of its cult. It was in this context that Mus raised the question of the *pradakṣiṇā* symbolism and its historical antecedents (see esp pp 135-39).” (Falk 1977:288 n21)

¹⁵³ “With a calm and bright heart of faith,” *pasanna,citta*, alt tr “with a clear mind of faith.” On faith (*saddhā*), see 7.8 below.

5. When there is unity, harmony and fellowship in the Saṅgha. (A 5.54/3:65-67)

Secondly, the pilgrimage should be done with a proper mental disposition, that is, properly reflecting on relevant act of the Buddha related to the holy place. Such reflections, when properly, are actually forms of “recollection of the Buddha” (*Buddhānussati*).

The (Agāta,phala) Mahānāma Sutta (A 6.10) records the Buddha’s teaching to the lay disciple Mahānāma the Sakya regarding the training practice (*nissaya, vihāra*) of “a noble disciple who has reached the fruit and understood the teaching” (*ariya, sāvako āgata, phalo viññāta, sāsano*). Clearly the description here refers to a lay follower who has attained streamwinning or higher. The teaching given, however, is simple. The Buddha speaks on how the noble disciple should practise the recollections (*anussati*) of the Buddha, of the Dharma, of the Saṅgha, of moral virtue, or generosity, and of the devas. At the end of each exposition, the refrain runs thus:

This, Mahānāma, is called the noble disciple who dwells righteous amongst an unrighteous generation, who dwells unafflicted amongst an afflicted generation, *who has entered the stream of the Dharma*,¹⁵⁴ and cultivates the recollection of the Buddha, ... [and so on for each of the recollections.]¹⁵⁵

(A 6.10,2/3:285)

As the lay disciple cultivates each of the recollections, his mind is not seized by lust, hatred or delusion, but becomes upright (*uju, gata*):

With an upright mind, he gains the inspiration of the goal, the inspiration of the Dharma, gladness (*pāmuja*) connected with the Dharma.

When he is gladdened, rapture (*pīti*) arises, his body becomes tranquil, and he experiences happiness.

For one who is happy, the mind becomes concentrated.¹⁵⁶

(A 6.10,2/3:285)

The Sa,upādisesa Sutta (A 9.12), dealing with the 3 trainings (*sikkhā*), speaks of streamwinners who are all “accomplished in moral virtue, but is moderately accomplished in concentration, moderately accomplished in wisdom,”¹⁵⁷ that is, their meditative attainment are at best “moderate” (*mattaso kārī*), which the Commentary glosses as “limited, not accomplished” (*pamāṇa, kārī na paripūra, kārī*, AA 4:174). This probably means that they are unable to attain full concentration, that is, they are not dhyana-attainers (*jhāyī, jhāna, lābhī*).

It is also possible that the phrase “moderately accomplished in concentration” (*samādhimim mattaso kārī*) refers the dhyana “with mental influxes, partaking of merit, ripening in birth-basis [accumulating the aggregates]” (*s’āsava puñña, bhāgiyā upadhi, vepakkā*) (M 117,7+13 etc).¹⁵⁸ In any case, it is clear that one does not need to attain dhyana to become a streamwinner. As such, it is not really difficult to gain awakening.¹⁵⁹ This generous albeit somewhat enigmatic remark made by the Buddha at the conclusion of the sutta confirms such a facility for awakening:

Not until now, Sāriputta, has this Dharma discourse been declared to the monks, the nuns, the laymen or the laywomen. What is the reason for this? Lest after listening to this Dharma discourse they become heedless! However, Sāriputta, through my being questioned, I have spoken this Dharma discourse. (A 9.12,10/4:381 f)

¹⁵⁴ On the “stream of the Dharma,” see **Miga, sālā S** (A 6.44/3:347-351, 10.75/5:137-144).

¹⁵⁵ *Ayam vuccati Mahānāma ariya, sāvako visama, gatāya pajāya samappatto viharati, sa, vyāpajjhāya pajāya avyāpajjho viharati, dhamma, sotam samāpanno buddhānussatiṃ bhāveti.*

¹⁵⁶ *Uju, gata, citto kho pana Mahānāma ariya, sāvako labhati attha, vedam, labhati dhamma, vedam, labhati dhamm-ūpasamhītam pāmujjam, pamuditassa pīti jāyati, pīti, manassa kāyo passambhati, passaddha, kāyo sukham vediyati, sukhino cīttam samādhīyati.*

¹⁵⁷ *Sīlesu paripūra, kārī hoti, samādhimim mattaso kārī, paññāya mattaso kārī.* The same is said of monastics in (**Mattaso, kārī**) **Sikkhā S** (A 3.85/1:231 f). In fact, the teachings of (Mattaso, kārī) **Sikkhā S** (for monks) is elaborated in **Sa, upādisesa S** (A 9.12) for the benefit of the laity. See Bodhi’s remarks on this, 2001:56 f.

¹⁵⁸ On *upādi* and *upadhi*, see SD 45.18 (2.5.2.7).

¹⁵⁹ See Piya Tan, “The layman and dhyana,” SD 8.5.

7.8 PASANNA, CITTA. The joyful state that permeates the faithful devotee and Buddhist saint (more so in the latter) is that of “a calm and bright heart of faith,” *pasanna, citta* [§5.8c], alternately translatable as “a clear mind of faith.”

There are two kinds of “faith,” *saddhā*:

- (1) “rootless faith” (*amūlika, saddhā*), baseless, irrational or a priori (before the fact) faith, blind faith. (M 2:170);
- (2) “faith with a good cause” (*ākāravati, saddhā*), a posteriori (after the fact) faith, faith founded on seeing (M 1:320,8 401,23); also called *avecca-p, pasāda* (S 12.41.11/2:69).

“Wise faith” is synonymous with (2). *Amūlika* = “not seen, not heard, not suspected.”¹⁶⁰ Gethin speaks of two kinds of faith: the cognitive and the affective:

Faith in its cognitive dimension is seen as concerning belief in propositions or statements of which one does not—or perhaps cannot—have knowledge proper (however that should be defined); cognitive faith is a mode of knowing in a different category from that knowledge. Faith in its affective dimension is a more straightforward positive response to trust or confidence towards something or somebody ... the conception of *saddhā* in Buddhist writings appears almost, if not entirely affective, the cognitive element is completely secondary. (Gethin 2001:107; my emphases)

Faith (*saddhā*), in the positive sense, according to **the Milinda, pañha and the Dhamma, saṅgāṇī Commentary**, has the characteristic of appreciation (*sampasādana, lakkhaṇa*) and of endeavour (*sampakkhandana, lakkhaṇa*).¹⁶¹ Of these two characteristics of faith (*pasāda*), N Dutt notes that¹⁶²

- (1) it is faith that generates zest or joyful interest (*pīti*);
- (2) it is self-confidence that generates effort (*virīya*).

The former (faith as appreciation) refers to the affective (or feeling) aspect of faith, corresponding to *pasāda*, which has an interesting range of meanings: clarity, brightness, joy, appreciation, faith, serenity.¹⁶³ The latter (faith as endeavour) refers to the conative (or willful) aspect of faith, that is, faith moves one to action (such as charity, moral virtue, learning the scripture, meditating, etc).

As Jayatilleke rightly notes, here Dutt (reflecting the commentarial explanation) is speaking of two aspects of *saddhā*, “and not of two different uses of the word altogether.”¹⁶⁴ When Dutt says that the pīti-generating faith is an antidote to vicikicchā (spiritual doubt) and moha (delusion), Jayatilleke criticizes him for “confusing the affective with the cognitive aspect of faith as “belief.”” (id).

However, pace Jayatilleke, it should be said that at any time, one characteristic of faith may dominate. In fact, Jayatilleke mentions a third aspect of faith, besides the affective and the conative, that is, the cognitive, of which he notes:

The Nettippakaraṇa draws attention to the cognitive aspect of *saddhā*, when it says inter alia that “faith has the characteristic of trust and the proximate state of belief (inclination)” (*okappana, lakkhaṇā saddhā adhimutti, paccupaṭṭhānā*, Nett 28).

In fact, we could well see the two aspects of *saddhā* (faith) here as the affective (“trust”) and the conative (“inclination”) rather than the cognitive. Furthermore, we can safely say, based on the commentarial explanation (the Milinda, pañha and Dhamma, saṅgāṇī Commentary) above, that the early Buddhists simply noted two kinds of faith: the rooted (wise faith) and the unrooted (blind faith). This has to do with wisdom (*paññā*): the former is rooted in wisdom (that is, direct experience of reality) and the latter merely on the basis of external authority (for example, another’s word or scripture). Simply put, when faith—whether affective, conative or cognitive—lack wisdom (the direct experience of reality), it is said to be “rootless” (*amūlika*); if it is rooted in wisdom, then it is wise faith (*avecca-p, pasāda*). This is, I think, as far as we can go when we try to apply modern category-

¹⁶⁰ V 2:243 3:163 & Comy.

¹⁶¹ Miln 34 & DhsA §304.

¹⁶² N Dutt, “Place of faith in Buddhism” in *Indian Historical Quarterly* 16, 1940:639. See also ERE: Faith & Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, 1963:387.

¹⁶³ Jayatilleke agrees on this, 1963:387. For further discussion on *pasāda*, see **Sampasādanīya S** (M 28/3:99-116 @ SD 10.12).

¹⁶⁴ Jayatilleke 1963:387.

ries (affective, conative and cognitive) to early Buddhism (which, strictly speaking, does not have those categories).¹⁶⁵

Let us return to our definition of “faith.” The word *pasanna* is the past participle of *pasīdati*, and the noun is *pasāda*. The *Pali-English Dictionary* defines these words as follows (as they are important words, the definitions are given here in full):

Pasīdati [pa + sad] 1. to become brighten, to brighten up PvA 132 *mukha,vaṇṇo* ~. — 2. to be purified, reconciled or pleased; to be clear & calm, to become of peaceful heart (*mano* or *cittaṃ* ~); to find one’s satisfaction in (loc), to have faith D 2:202; S 1:98, 2:199 *sutvā dhammaṃ* ~; A 3:248; Sn 356, 434, 563; Nc 426 = *saddahati, adhimuccati okappeti*; Vv 50.13 *mano pasīdi*, aor; Vism 129; Miln 9; DhA 3:3 = he is gracious, ie good; VvA 6 (better vl *passivā*); PvA 141. —pp *pasanna* (qv). See also *pasādeti & vipasīdati*.

Pasanna (adj) [pp of *pasīdati*] 1. clear, bright Sn 5:50 *~netta*; KhA 64 & 65 *~tila,tela,vaṇṇa*, where Vism 262 reads *vippasanna*~; Vism 409 (id). — 2. happy, gladdened, reconciled, pleased J 1:151, 307; Vism 129 *muddha*~. — 3. pleased in one’s conscience, reconciled, believing, trusting in (loc), pious, good, virtuous A 3:35 *Satthari, dhamme saṅghe*; S 1:34 *Buddhe*, 5:374; Vv 5.9; Sn 698; Dh 368 *Buddha,sāsane*; J 2:111; DhA 1:60 *Satthari*. Often combined with *saddha* (having faith) V 2:190; PvA 20, 42 (*a*~), and in cpd. *~citta* devotion in one’s heart V 1:16; A 4:209; Sn 316, 403, 690; Pv 2.1.6; SnA 460; PvA 129; or *~mānasa* Sn 402; VvA 39; PvA 67; cp *pasannena manasā* S 1:206; Dh 2. See also *abhippasanna & vippasanna*.

Pasāda [fr pa + sad, cp Vedic prasāda] 1. clearness, brightness, purity; referring to the colours (“visibility”) of the eye (J 1:319 *akkhīni maṇi,guḷa,sadisāni paññāyamāna pañca-p,pasādāni ahesuṃ*); SnA 453 (*pasanna,netto*, ie *pañca,vaṇṇa-p,pasāda,sampattiyā*). — 2. joy, satisfaction, happy or good mind, virtue, faith (M 1:64 *Satthari*; S 1:202; A 1:98, 222 *Buddhe* etc, 2:84, 3:270 *puggala*~, 4:346; SnA 155; PvA 5, 35. — 3. repose, composure, allayment, serenity (Nett 28, 50; Vism 107, 135; ThaA 258).¹⁶⁶

Both the verb *pasīdati* and its adjective (in the past participle) *pasanna* refer to the action (to show faith; faithful) and the result of faith (inspired with faith; faithful). Understandably these shades of meanings overlap in part. Such a state of mind is induced and maintained by acts of lovingkindness (*mettā bhāvanā*). This is the mental state that should suffuse one especially when one goes on a pilgrimage [7,7]. And yet with such a mind, one is already there in a pilgrim’s state of mind.

After the Buddha has instructed on how “the faithful son of family” [§5.8.1] and “the faithful monks and nuns, laymen and laywomen, too” [§5.8b] should arouse samvega in themselves while at the holy places, he goes on to declare the benefit of such a pilgrimage:

Anyone who dies with a calm and bright heart of faith (*pasanna,citta*) while making a pilgrimage of these shrines,¹⁶⁷ at the breaking up of the body after death, is reborn in a happy state, a heavenly world.
(D 16,5.8c/2:141)

It is important to examine both the letter and the spirit of this statement. While it might be spiritually good to die *while* on pilgrimage, this is not so stated here. “A calm and bright heart of faith” is a mind that is at least temporarily free from defilements, which will as such be basis for a good rebirth (that is, if this were one’s last thought before dying). A similar remark is made at the end of **the Mahā Rāhul’ovāda Sutta Rāhula**, in connection with breath meditation:

¹⁶⁵ It is interesting to note here how one would categorise the “academic faith” of those who take Buddhism merely as a professional field of interest and livelihood, for example. Academic standards clearly do not allow blind faith, and yet academic faith cannot be said to be “rooted,” in the sense that that “wise faith” has spiritual liberation as its goal.

¹⁶⁶ This last definition is abridged. The PED format is slightly revised.

¹⁶⁷ “While making a pilgrimage of these shrines,” *cetiya,carikaṃ āhiṇḍantā*, lit “while wandering on a walking-tour of these shrines.” “**Shrines**,” *cetiya*. We have here what some would regard as the basis for stupa worship: see **Intro (7.3)** for the nature of stupa worship.

...when the mindfulness of in-and-out-breathing is cultivated and often developed in this manner, even the last breath leaves with your knowledge, not without it.”¹⁶⁸ (M 62,30/1:425 f)

The benefit of keeping a clear mind, especially at the moment of dying, is clear: it brings one a good rebirth. However, it is very important to note that pilgrimages, relic worship and stupa worship, in themselves, at best bring a good rebirth (that is, if one “dies with a calm and bright heart”)—but one still remains within the grasp of samsara.

Most importantly, in the highest sense, pilgrimage spots, relics and stupas are less places than they are wholesome states of mind.¹⁶⁹ This teaching is clearly stated in **the Vatthūpama Sutta** (M 7), where the Buddha declares to the brahmin Sundarika Bhāradvāja, who thinks that washing in a sacred river could bring one liberation, and merit, and wash away one’s bad deeds:

For the pure at heart, it is always the holy day in spring [Phalgu].
For the pure, it is always the precept day [poshadha].
For one who is pure, whose deeds are pure,
His religious practice is always successful.

Bathe right here, brahmin,
To make yourself a secure refuge for all beings.
If you speak no falsehood,
If you harm not any living being,
If you do not take the not given,
Faithful and free from stinginess,
What need is there for you to go to Gayā?
Any well is Gayā for you (to wash at)!

(M 7,20/1:39), SD 28.12

7.9 AUTHENTICITY OF RELICS. Legend has it that during the visit of Mon monks to Sri Lanka, Vijaya Bāhu (1059-1114) miraculously produced a copy of the eye-tooth relic of the Buddha which was presented to king Anawrahta [Anuruddha] of Burma (r 1044-77), who in turn installed it in the Shwezigon Stupa in Pagan. This gift of Buddha relic would become a popular diplomatic gesture from the Sinhalese. By the end of the 13th century, it was customary that every ruler of Sri Lanka must have the Buddha’s eye-tooth relic in his custody to legitimize his reign. After Parākrama Bāhu I, no Sinhalese king ever actually regained control of the whole island, but the tooth accompanied the recognized king to various strongholds and refuges. Towards the end of the 13th century, the inevitable happened: the tooth relic (or its replica, some claimed) was captured and brought to the Paṇḍu kingdom in South India.

During the 13th century, Kublai Khan, the Mongol emperor of China, sent an envoy to Sri Lanka requesting that the tooth relic be sent to him. The reigning king having obliged by sending not one, but two tooth relics, which Kublai received with great pomp and ceremony. Having become well known throughout the Eastern world as the possessor of the Buddha’s eye tooth, the Sinhalese king apparently exploited this reputation in a diplomatic manner by trading freely in dubious Buddha relics. The real tooth remained jealously guarded.

In March 1992, Shi Fazhao (a Singapore Chinese Mahāyāna monk) led a pilgrimage to Sri Lanka to receive relics of the Buddha, Sāriputta, Moggallāna, Sīvali, Mahā Kaccāyana, and Bakkula, in a ceremony presided by Sri Lanka’s then President, Ranasinghe Premadasa. In 2003, a Mahāyāna monks from Johor, Malaysia, presented the Buddhist Fellowship (Singapore) with the relics of the Buddha, the 5 monks (Koṇḍañña, Bhaddiya, Vappa, Mahānāma, and Assaji), Sāriputta, Moggallāna, Upāli, Anuruddha, Sīvali and Ānanda. In early 2003, it was announced that the Moggallāna relic had multiplied from two to three!

¹⁶⁸ When a dying person is mindful of his breath, he dies calmly with mindfulness and full awareness. The **Visuddhi-magga** says: “Herein there are three kinds of (breaths that are) final because of cessation, that is to say, final in existence, final in absorption, final in death. For, among the various kinds of existence, in-breaths and out-breaths occur in the sense-sphere existence, not in the form-existence nor the formless existence. That is why there are final ones in existence. In the absorptions, they occur in the first three but not in the fourth. That is why there are final ones in absorption. Those that arise along with the sixteenth consciousness proceeding the death consciousness cease together with the death consciousness. They are called ‘final in death’. It is these last that are meant here by ‘final’” (Vism 8.241/p291 f). On the 17 thought-moments, see Abdh 4.6, rev tr Bodhi 2nd ed 1999:153 ff. For a brief explanation, see GP Sumanapala, *An Introduction to Theravada Abhidhamma*, Singapore, 1998:137 (ch 8).

¹⁶⁹ See also An Yang-Gyu, “Relic worship: A devotional institute in early Buddhism,” 2002a:159.

It is truly propitious for Singapore to attract so much relics within a year. In fact, a large Chinese Mahāyāna temple in Singapore plans to build a S\$40m Buddha tooth-relic temple in her Chinatown for devotees and tourists.¹⁷⁰ The almost sudden profusion of Buddhist relics in Singapore can be explained in one of two ways: if they have a verifiable history, they came down from one of the original eight portions of relics distributed by Doṇa [§6.25b]; or, they were “consecrated relics,” that is, manufactured by pious hands by way of burning or ageing suitable materials, such as ivory and crystals.¹⁷¹ Like Buddha images, such objects, once consecrated, would be regarded as sacred relics by the pious and open-minded.

Authenticity is for historians and scholars: the immediately palpable is for the pious, even if it is at a price. When religiosity is externalized or concretized, there is always a good chance for venal practices (simony) and superstitions. There is great wisdom in the Buddha’s exhortation that we seek refuge in ourselves and no other [§2.26].

7.10 RELIC THEFTS. In the last century, extensive study has been done by scholars on Christian relic veneration, and relic theft was one of the interesting issues addressed. Patrick Geary, in his *Furtiva Sacra* (1978), for example, has contributed an instructive analysis of relic theft and its religious significance in the Christian west from the 9th through the 11th centuries.¹⁷² Kevin Trainor, in *Relics, Ritual, and Representation in Buddhism* (1997)¹⁷³ discusses relic theft in connection with the Buddha relics in India and Sri Lanka, centering his discussions around the Pali texts—especially the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta—and two late Sinhalese hagiographical chronicles, the Thūpa,vaṃsa and the Dhātu,vaṃsa.¹⁷⁴

The fascinating story of the Buddha relics may be said to begin where the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta closes [§§6.24-28]. When word spread that the Buddha had attained parinirvana, eight powerful groups asked for a share of the Buddha relics, but were turned down by the Mallas of Kusinārā who had been taking care of the mortuary rites for the Buddha. Although the sutta does not explicitly say it, growing tension leading to armed conflict was clearly evident [§6.25]. The imminent danger of war over the relics is depicted in the basreliefs of the Sañcī stupa.¹⁷⁵

The appeal of relics is clearly not just spiritual, but also mundane due to their portability and promise of power. In this connection, Trainor’s observation is sorely instructive:

This episode [of the imminent war over the Buddha relics] lays bare a fundamental tension inherent in the Buddhist relic cult, even as it illuminates its appeal. Relics, as material objects that one can possess, fully engage the human capacity for attachment and manipulation. Therein lies part of their attraction. They provide access to religious power in a particular time and place, and, through their easy portability, facilitate the creation of new centers of sacrality. Yet there is something potentially disturbing about this in terms of the Buddha ideal of non-attachment. Relics can be the object of desire; they encourage the human tendency to cling. What is striking about this passage is the way in which it invokes the Buddhist ideal of forbearance and nonattachment, even as it affirms a religious practice that appears to encourage a kind of acquisitiveness. The episode serves to instruct the faithful that the Buddha’s relics are worthy of veneration, while it simultaneously demonstrates the potential threat that the practice represents to the tradition’s fundamental religious ideals.

(Trainor 1997:119 f; cf Gombrich 1988:119 f)

With the averting of a major disaster, smaller ones abound. The Dīgha Commentary provides some interesting details about the earliest incident of relic theft in the Canon. Although the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta presents the brahmin **Doṇa** as a person of some authority [§6.25], he appears in Comy as to be somewhat of a conniver. Before distributing the relics, Doṇa shows the relics to the assembly, who upon seeing their sorry state, were overcome with sadness and lamentation. While they were engrossed in their grief, Doṇa hides the Buddha’s

¹⁷⁰ Such wealth is, I think, better invested in a Buddhist college or university, whose graduates are then supported as qualified lay teachers and ministers by temples, associations and groups they serve.

¹⁷¹ Including dog’s tooth: see Appendix.

¹⁷² See Trainor 1997 117 n72 for bibliography.

¹⁷³ Trainor 1997:117-135.

¹⁷⁴ See also J S Strong, *Relics of the Buddha*, 2004:109 f.

¹⁷⁵ Marshall & Foucher, *Monuments of Sāñchī*, 1940 1:112-119, 214 f, pls 15, 61.

right eye-tooth in his turban (DA 1:7, 2:609; Mahv 17.20).¹⁷⁶ Sakra (P *sakka*; Skt *śakra*), the king of the gods, concerned that Doṇa will be unable to pay due honour to the relic, steals it and spirits it away to the Tāvātimsa heaven and enshrines it in the Cūḷā,maṇī Shrine which already contains the hair relic of the Bodhisattva during the great renunciation (J 1:65; BA 284).

The Commentary continues by saying that while distributing the relics, Doṇa discovers his loss but is unable to complain of it because he has taken it by theft. Since it is too late for him to request for a share, he can only ask for the measuring urn, which is after all connected with the relics (*dhātu,gatika*) so that he can build a stupa over it (DA 2:609).

The **Dhātu,vamsa** (a late Pali hagiographical chronicle of Sri Lanka, probably early 14th cent) builds on the episode of Doṇa's theft of the eye-tooth and its subsequent theft by Sakra. The Dhātu,vamsa goes on to relate how Doṇa hid a second eye-tooth between his toes, and a third inside his clothing. The second relic is subsequently stolen by the naga-king Jayasena, who enshrines it in his abode. The third is taken by an unnamed resident of Gandhāra who, seizing it "with good intent" (Dhatv 18-19), takes it back to Gandhāra and shrines it. Understandably, Doṇa was visibly devastated by his multiple losses but is consoled by Sakra himself.¹⁷⁷

The Buddha relics of Rāma,gāma (situated on the Ganges bank) has a fascinating history or mythology behind it as recorded in Thūpa,vamsa, a late Pali hagiographical chronicle of Sri Lanka (13th cent). It recounts how the Rāmagāma relics were washed into the waters during a great flood. The naga-king, Mahākāḷa, saved the relics and enshrined them in great splendour in his Mañjerika nāga abode, worshipping them with lavish offerings.¹⁷⁸

7.11 RELICS, POWER AND PROFIT. For Buddhists, the mobility or portability of sacred relics provided a new relationship with the Buddha, the arhats and later saints.

Indeed, the transfer of relics to, and their discovery in, Southeast Asia and East Asia became so common that one might argue, as Brown [1981] has noted in the context of Christendom, that "Translations—the movement of relics to people—and not pilgrimages—the movement of people to relics—hold the center of the stage in late-antique and early-medieval piety" (pp 89-96).

(Brian O Ruppert, "Relics and relic cults," EB:B (2003:716)

Ruppert further notes a few disturbing details in Buddhist history, on the social-political uses of relics:

Imperial patronage of relic veneration in China, Sri Lanka, and other areas of Asia constituted both a demonstration of the ruler's largess and a response to the fervor of local Buddhists. For example, the writings of Chinese pilgrims such as Faxian (ca 337-418) indicate that the Chinese were aware of the practice among Asian rulers of conducting relic processions to bolster their authority, and the large crowds that attended such processions gave evidence of faith among the populace. Indeed, a famous tract by Han Yu (768-824)¹⁷⁹ argued forcefully against welcoming the relic of the Buddha's finger from Famensi into the Chinese imperial palace in 819. Han Yu demonstrated in his criticisms of believers' behavior the extent of their devotion, whereby some burned their heads and fingers, and discarded clothing and large numbers of coins. On the occasion of another procession of Buddha relics in 873, worshippers variously offered their arms, fingers, and hair in acts that symbolically matched the bodily sacrifices that Śākyamuni as a bodhisattva had made in the *jātaka* tales.

(Ruppert, "Relics and relic cults," EB:B (2003:718)

Such "repositories of power,"¹⁸⁰ inevitably encourages the commodification of religiosity. Tambiah notes the tragic consequences of the "vulgar materialization" of the amulet industry in Thailand, which very well applies to the cult of relics today, too, with these words:

It is inevitable in the Thai case that this process of vulgar materialization, this law of gravity, should have further consequences. One is that the amulet moves from a context of donation and love (*mettā*) to

¹⁷⁶ DPPN: Cūḷāmaṇicetiya, mentions only "the right collar bone."

¹⁷⁷ See Trainor 1997:132-135. On *Doṇa*, see (**Pāda**) **Doṇa S** (A 4.36/2"37 f), SD 36.13 (2.1).

¹⁷⁸ See Trainor 1997:124-135.

¹⁷⁹ Han Yu (韓愈) (768-824), a founder of Neo-Confucianism and poet, who launched a "movement for the language" (古文運動). Without imitating the ancient style that dominated the Han to the Tang dynasties, he hoped to reform its ornate style, heavily limited by parallel sentences.

¹⁸⁰ See Marcel Mauss, *The Gift* (NY: Norton, 1976) which focuses on "power in objects of exchange) & S J Tambiah, *The Buddhist Saints of the Forest and the Cult of Amulets*, 1993:339.

a context of trade and profit: It is converted into a highly salable good and enters the bazaar and marketplace. When it does so, it also stimulates the production of fakes and becomes a pawn in the usual publicity media of advertisements, catalogues, magazine articles, books, and the mythology of miracles. A second consequence is that the more amulets are produced, the more they deteriorate in their mystical powers (despite the initiatory spiral of prices of rare antiques). This means that new amulets come into fashion and many others are condemned to be forgotten or less desired: moreover, the propensity to accumulate amulets increases, in the simple arithmetical calculation that the more you possess, the more clout you have. Thus the comparison of the relative virtues of amulets lead to mystical power itself, which is both limitless and rare, being graduated, weighed in a balance, or quantified in terms of money.

(S J Tambiah, *The Buddhist Saints of the Forest and the Cult of Amulets*, 1993:336)

8 The Buddha as a Roman Catholic saint: Barlaam & Josaphat

8.1 Apparently, the relics of the Buddha made fabulous journeys even into the West—and outside of Buddhism. Few mediaeval Christian names are better known than those of **Barlaam and Josaphat**,¹⁸¹ who were credited with the “second conversion” of India to “Christianity,” after the country had relapsed to “paganism” following the mission of the Apostle Thomas. Barlaam and Josaphat were remembered in the roll of saints recognized by the Roman Catholic Church with the festival day of **27 November**. In the Greek Church, Iosaph (Josaphat) was commemorated on **26 August**, while the Russians remember both Barlaam and Ioasaph, together with the latter’s father, king Abenner (Śuddhōdāna), on **19 November** (2 December, Old Style). Sir Henry Yule once visited a church at Palermo, Italy, dedicated to “**Divo Josaphat**.”

8.2 In 1571, the Doge Luigi Mocenigo presented to King Sebastian of Portugal a **bone and part of the spine** of St Josaphat. When Spain annexed Portugal in 1580, these sacred treasures were removed by Antonio, the Pretender to the Portuguese throne, and ultimately found its way to Antwerp, Belgium, where they were preserved in the cloister of St Salvator.

8.3 After the European colonists had settled in India with the arrival of Roman Catholic missionaries, some of them were struck by the similarities between episodes and features of the life of St Josaphat and those of the Buddha, as is clearly evident from the early 17th century Portuguese writer **Diogo do Couto** who declared this fact. By the 1850s, European scholars doing comparative study of the legend of St Josaphat [“Bodhisat”] and the life of the Buddha, “came to the startling conclusion that for almost a thousand years, the Buddha in the guise of the holy Josaphat, had been revered as a saint of the principal Churches of Christendom”! (D M Lang, introduction, *Barlaam & Josaphat*, 1967:x).

9 The Buddha’s life and death

9.1 THE LIFESPANS OF THE BUDDHAS. A Buddha (that is, any fully self-awakened being) has the power to live for a whole lifespan (*kappa*, Skt *kalpa*) of his time, but no Buddha does so because the term is shortened by reason of climate and the food he takes (DA 2:413). In the Mahāpadāna Sutta (D 14), the Buddha mentions the various lifespans of the 6 past Buddhas: Vipassī, 80,000 years; Sikhī, 70,000 years; Vessabhū, 60,000 years; Kakusandha, 40,000 years; Konāgamaṇa, 30,000 years; Kassapa, 20,000 years.¹⁸² (Interestingly, none of these Buddha’s lifespan is mentioned to be as long as a “fortunate world-cycle,” *bhadda,kappa*, as claimed by Mahāsīva Thera).¹⁸³

Then, in the Sutta, the Buddha goes on to declare,

My own lifespan now, bhikshus, is trifling and short, quick to pass. One who lives long (here) lives only for more or less a hundred years (*mayham bhikkhave etarahi appakam āyu-p,pamānam parittam lahusam, yo ciram jīvati so vassa,satam appam vā bhiyyo*).
(D 14.7/2:4)

¹⁸¹ See, for example, Graeme MacQueen’s “Changing Master Narratives in Midstream: *Barlaam and Josaphat* and the Growth of Religious Intolerance in the Buddhalegend’s Westward Journey.” *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 5 1998:144-166.

¹⁸² On the past Buddhas, see **Mahāpadāna S** (D 14), SD 49.8 (2).

¹⁸³ DA 2:554; SA 3:251; AA 4:143; UA 323. See below here (c)(2).

In **Vepulla Pabbata Sutta** (S 15.20/2:192), the Buddha says exactly the same of “the lifespan of the Magadhans.” The phrase “more or less a hundred years” (*vassa,satam appam vā bhīyyo*) is stock.¹⁸⁴

No Buddha, however, dies before his dispensation is firmly established. Some Buddhas live longer than others. They who are long-lived have only direct disciples¹⁸⁵ who hear the Dharma in his presence, and at their final passing, their relics are not scattered, but have a single stupa erected over them (SnA 194 f). Short-lived Buddhas hold their *uposatha*¹⁸⁶ fortnightly. Others (like Kassapa Buddha) may hold it only once every six months; yet others (like Vipassī Buddha) only once every six years (ThaA 1:62). In cases where the Buddha does not appoint the observance of the Pātimokkha (eg Vipassī, Sikhī, Vessabhū) the teaching quickly dies after his parinirvana. However, where the Buddha appoints the Pātimokkha (such as Kakucchanda, Konagamana, Kassapa, Gotama), the holy life lasts very long (V 3:7 f; cf. D 2:48).

9.2 THE BUDDHA GOTAMA’S LIFESPAN

9.2.0 Problem with the Buddha’s death. Our Buddha (Gotama/Gautama) lived a full life of 80 and taught the Dharma for 45 years.¹⁸⁷ Understandably, the death of such a dynamic and charismatic holy person is deeply mourned and, amongst the deeply faithful, deeply denied. There is evidence that the early Buddhists found it truly problematic why the Buddha had died at the age of 80 when the common belief then was that the average human lifespan was actually 100 years (S 2:94 f; B 26.21; BA 54, 273).¹⁸⁸

There are two distinct accounts in the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta regarding the Buddha’s lifespan. The first is found in **the Beluva episode** of the Buddha’s overcoming his serious illness [§§2.23-24], and the second, **the Cāpāla shrine episode** of the Buddha’s relinquishment of his lifespan [§§3.9-10]. While the first involves the Buddha’s extending his lifespan until such time he has addressed the fourfold assemblies, the latter is the letting go of his will to live beyond this extended period.

9.2.1 The Beluva episode. Buddhaghosa explains the Buddha’s overcoming his serious illness (dysentery) at Beluva [§2.23] as a result of his own physical strength and from his meditative attainment of fruition (*phala,samāpatti*). This new strength, derived from the attainment, helps him to both overcome the illness and extend his life. Buddhaghosa goes on to explain that there are two kinds of “life-formation” (*jīvita,sankhārā* or *āyu,sankhāra*), namely, (1) life itself by which life is propelled on, and (2) the attainment of fruition. The former, acquired at birth, refers to a kind of “life-faculty” (*jīvit’indriya*) which maintains and vitalizes the living physical body, whose quality and length is further determined by past karma, and whose length is determined at birth.¹⁸⁹ The latter is nurtured in the current life, and according to Buddhaghosa, it is this latter that is referred to in the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta (DA 2:547).¹⁹⁰

It is important to note that Buddhaghosa defines the life-impetus [*jīvita,sankhāra*] as the attainment of fruition. By so defining it, he understands that the Buddha overcomes his illness by attaining the attainment; he does not prolong his life-faculty by *iddhi*, but simply counteracts his illness by attaining the attainment. His introduction of the term “the attainment of fruition” should be understood in contrast with the mystical power, *iddhi*. He seems to ignore the belief in the Buddha’s power to live on by *iddhi* by introducing *phala-samāpatti* (the attainment of fruition).

(An Yang-Gyu, “Buddhaghosa’s view of the Buddha’s lifespan,” 2000:136 f; emphasis added)

There are two kinds of *phala,samāpatti*: (1) temporary attainment (*khaṇika,samāpatti*), and (2) attainment in the form of great insight (*mahā vipassanā*). The temporary attainment suppresses pain while one remains in the attainment. As soon as one emerges from the attainment, the pain pervades the body again. The attainment in the form of great insight, however, suppresses pain very well. After emerging from that state, pain re-arises only

¹⁸⁴ D 14,7/ 2:4 = S 4.9/1:108 = 15.20/2:192; qu at DA 2:413.

¹⁸⁵ *Sammukha sāvakā*, Skt *sāmmukha śrāvakā*.

¹⁸⁶ Skt *uposadha*, Observance or ecclesiastical conclave to recite the *pātimokkha/prātimokṣa*.

¹⁸⁷ Jesus Christ (c6 BCE-c30 CE) lived for about 36 years but his public ministry lasted for only about two to three years. Muhammad (c570-632), who lived for about 62 years, taught publicly for some 19 years (c613-632).

¹⁸⁸ On the significance of the Buddha’s death, see SD 49.8b (1.0.5.2 (12))+(12.3.1.1)+(17.2.2.4).

¹⁸⁹ Rhys Davids aptly renders the first kind of *jīvit’indriya* as “life till allotted time” (D:RD 2:106; cf Divy 203).

¹⁹⁰ **The Dhanu-gaha Sutta** (S 20.6/2:265 f) says that the life-formation runs faster than the speed at which as man could catch a flying arrow. Comy there says that *āyu,sankhāra* refers to the physical life-faculty (*rūpa,jīvit’indriya*), but it is impossible to describe the breakup of formless phenomena (ie mental states, because according to the Abhidhamma, they break up 16 times faster than physical states) (SA 2:227).

after a long time. Buddhaghosa says that the Buddha has attained the temporary attainment before, but this is the first time that his attainment is in the form of great insight (DA 2:547).¹⁹¹

9.2.2 The Cāpāla shrine episode

9.2.2.1 At the **Cāpāla Shrine**, the Buddha thrice tells Ānanda that he (the Buddha) is able to live longer if he wishes to—for a full life-span or the remainder of it. The Buddha explains that anyone who has developed the 4 bases of spiritual power (*iddhi, pādā*)¹⁹² will be able to live for a full life-span (*kappa*, about 100 years) or a little more (*kappāvasesa*) (of about 120-160 years) [§§3.3-5].¹⁹³ Ānanda, however, does not understand the meaning or implication of the Buddha's statement and remains silent, even after being informed three times (D 2:103; cf D 3:77).¹⁹⁴ The Commentary explains that Ānanda's mind is obsessed (*pariyuṭṭhita, citta*) by **Māra's exhibiting a fearsome sight** that distracts him, preventing him from appreciating what the Buddha says. The Buddha then dismisses Ānanda who takes his leave and sits down at the foot of the nearby tree (DA 2:555).

9.2.2.2 The whole story here sounds clearly contrived, that is, presenting the Buddha almost as a doting father-figure who is unable to make up his own mind, and for that the loyal “son” Ānanda is blamed later by the elders of the order. This is an important piece of evidence showing that the early Buddhists had genuine difficulty in accepting the Buddha's passing when he was 80.

What would have happened if Ānanda had actually been mindful and invited the Buddha to remain for his full lifespan (or for a world cycle)? How would the Buddha then answer Māra's reminder of the Buddha's statement made just after the great awakening that he would only pass away when the fourfold assemblies of monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen has been established [§§3.7-8]. It is evident from the Buddha's statement that he does not say that he will pass away *immediately* upon the establishment of the fourfold assemblies, but it effectively could be any time *after* that, which would be an indefinite period!

9.2.2.3 SIGNIFICANCE. There is a vital significance to the Buddha's renunciation of his life-formation. The Buddha's awakening does not depend on a God-idea, the gods, or any teacher. The Buddha's awakening, too, does not entail that he should declare it to others, but when later requested by the Brahmā Sahampati, a non-returner (*anāgāmī*), he teaches the Dharma for our benefit.¹⁹⁵ In the **Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta** (D 16), it is recorded that when Ānanda does not invite the Buddha to extend his life-span to continue teaching, he renounces the life-formation and passes into final nirvana. This gentle unobtrusive spirit of humility and wisdom is at the heart of the Buddhist mission, reminds us that the highest truth is not (and cannot) be forced upon another, but like nourishing food, it can only be offered to others, but they must themselves partake of it.

9.2.3 Iddhi, pādā. The *iddhi, pādā* are explained in the **Chanda Sutta** (S 51.13/5:268 f). The term is elaborated according to the Sutta method in the Vibhāṅga (Vbh 216-220), and according to the Abhidhamma method at Vbh 220-224, where they are factors of the supramundane paths.¹⁹⁶ The Commentaries resolve *iddhi, pādā* as

¹⁹¹ See Vism 700 where Buddhaghosa explains the purpose of gaining the attainment of fruition, ie for the abiding in bliss here and now.

¹⁹² *Iddhi, pādā* (Skt *ṛddhi, pādā*), the 4 bases of spiritual power, namely: will or intention (*chanda*), energy or effort (*virīya*), consciousness or mind (*citta*) and mental investigation (*vīmaṃsa*) (D 3:77, D 3:213 = M1:103 = 2:11; D 3:221; Vbh 216). The suttas generally say that the *iddhi, pādā* bring one the 6 superknowledges (*abhīññā*), viz, (1) psychic powers (*iddhi, vidhā*), (2) the divine ear or clairaudience (*dibba, sota*), (3) knowledge of the mind of the others (mind-reading) (*ceto, pariya, ñāṇa*), (4) the divine eye or clairvoyance (*dibba, cakkhu*), (5) recollection of past lives (*pubbe, nivāsānussati*), (6) the extinction of all mental influxes (*āsava-k, khaya*) (D 34.1.7(10)/3:282; M 4.27-32/1:22 f, 6.14-18/1:34 f, 77.31-36/2:17-23; S 15.9/2:178, 51.2/5:254; A 5.23/3:17-19; Pug 27, 239). Of these 6 superknowledges, the first 5 are mundane, only the last is supramundane (connected to spiritual liberation) For a definition of the 6 super-powers (with similes), see **Sāmañña, phala S** (D 2.87-98/1:78-84), SD 8 (2005). It is important to note that although the *iddhi, pādā* lead to the attainment of various psychic powers (*iddhi*), ie (1)-(5), it is the mental cultivation or meditation aspects that are directly related to the extension of lifespan, and not the psychic power in themselves. See Ledi Sayadaw, *The Manuals of Buddhism*, 1965: 333-338 & Gethin 2001:94-97.

¹⁹³ On this tr see (9.3) quoting D 26.

¹⁹⁴ The Buddha actually lists 16 occasions [§§3.41-47] when he has mentioned to Ānanda regarding his lifespan!

¹⁹⁵ See “**Why did the Buddha hesitate?**” @ SD 11.1.

¹⁹⁶ See also Vism 385/12.50-53 & VbhA 303-308.

iddhiyā pādāṃ, “bases for spiritual success” and as *iddhi, bhūtaṃ pādāṃ*, “bases which is spiritual success.”¹⁹⁷ As such, the best translation denoting both senses will be “bases of spiritual success.”

Iddhi is derived from the verb *ijjhati* (to prosper, succeed, flourish): it originally means “success,” but by the Buddha’s time “had already acquired the special nuance of spiritual success or, even more to the point, spiritual power” (S:B 1939 f n246). The term here has 2 senses: (1) success in the exercise of the psychic powers (*iddhi, vidhā*),¹⁹⁸ and (2) success in the effort to win liberation. The two converge in arhathood, which as *āsava-k, kha-ya, ñāṇa*, is both the sixth *abhiññā* (in continuity with the psychic powers) and the final fruit of of the noble eightfold path.

The *iddhi, pādā* (bases of spiritual success), as such, are the supporting conditions for the exercise of psychic powers (*iddhi*). However, as the fourfold “path” (*pāda*), *iddhi* should be translated as “success,” as it reflects an older usage.¹⁹⁹

What we can deduce from the text is that the Buddha simply gives up his will to live (*āyu, saṅkhāra*). As Rhys Davids note, the earliest meaning of *āyu, saṅkhāra* is the will to live (D:RD 2:106); and, as noted by Shwe Zan Aung and Rhys Davids, *saṅkhāra* may be used as a synonym for *cetanā* (volition), since it is the foremost of the *samskaras*²⁰⁰ (Kvu:SRD 323 n4). In her *Identity and Experience*, Sue Hamilton makes these helpful remarks:

The way the *saṅkhāras* act as a “fuel” for the individual’s continuing *samsāric* existence is not difficult to understand from all of the foregoing. We can see the way volitions in one life condition a subsequent life and how this process is reinforced through its cyclic nature. We have also seen how fundamentally this is embedded in the psychological nature of the human being, in the desire for conditioned existence, for example. This probably explains why the term *saṅkhāra* is also used together with *āyu* or *jīvita* to mean the “life-force.” In the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*, we read that the Buddha can either deliberately hold on to this life force [D 16,2.23/2.99] or give it up and die [D 16,3.10/2:106]. Elsewhere it is used as one of the defining characteristics of a live person: without it there is only a dead body [M 1:296].²⁰¹ (Sue Hamilton 1996:78)

The Visuddhi, magga (Vism 8.2-3/229) says that there are two kinds of death: timely (*kāla, maraṇa*) and untimely (*akāla, maraṇa*). Timely death itself comes about in three ways: through the exhaustion of merit, or through the exhaustion of life-span, or through both. Gethin (2001:95) notes that all this suggests that there are three factors involved: the maximum potential lifespan of a human being in general; the particular potential lifespan of a given individual; and “adventitious circumstances” that might interfere with this and bring about an untimely death.

What I have termed “adventitious circumstances” are, of course, understood to work within the law of *karma-vipāka*, and are determined in principle by what is called “destructive” (*upaghātaka*) or “intervening” (*upacchedaka*) *kamma*.²⁰² This kind of *kamma* overrides and supplants weaker *kamma*, and may be both skilful and unskillful. Presumably then, whether or not an individual’s potential lifespan is fulfilled depends on any unskillful destructive *kamma*. When these principles are applied to the question of the *iddhi-pādas* and the prolongation of life, what seems to be envisaged—at least as far as the Pāli commentaries are concerned—is that anyone in whom the *iddhi-pādas* are fully developed will have complete mastery over any untimely death and live out his full potential lifespan. In other words, the development of the *iddhi-pādas* constitutes a skilful “destructive” *kamma* of a kind that overrides any unskillful “destructive” *kamma*. (Gethin, *The Buddhist Path to Awakening*, 2001:95)

The Commentaries all agree that the Buddha has not used *iddhi* (psychic power) to prolong his lifespan (as held by the Mahāsaṅghika, for example). **The Kathā, vatthu** refutes the notion that lifespan is the result of *iddhi* [9c]: one’s lifespan is shaped by karma done in previous lives, and is determined at the moment of conception.²⁰³ In keeping with this notion, Buddhaghosa explains that one who has *iddhi* will be able to avert untimely

¹⁹⁷ DA 3:1007; MA 2:69; SA 3:250; AA 2:50.

¹⁹⁸ S 51.11/5:263-66, 51.14/5:269-71 51.17/ 5:274 f.

¹⁹⁹ On *iddhi, pāda*, see *Catu iddhi, pāda*, SD 10.3.

²⁰⁰ I have anglicized the Skt form for *saṅkhārā*.

²⁰¹ On this last note, where *āyu, saṅkhāra* is combined with heat (*usmā*) and consciousness (*viññāṇa*), see Hamilton 1996 chs 1 & 5; cf D 2:335.

²⁰² Vism 8.2-3, 19.13-16; cf Pm 5.11-13. Gethin’s fn.

²⁰³ See Jaini, “Buddha’s prolongation of life,” 1958:548.

death (KvuA 121).²⁰⁴ However, there is a limitation to *iddhi*: it cannot prevent ageing, falling ill, dying and the fruiting of karma. It is impossible for *iddhi* to make permanent what is not permanent (KvuA 189 f). As such, it is clear that Buddhaghosa does not accept the prolongation of life by *iddhi*.

Buddhaghosa does not comment much on the Cāpāla shrine episode, but simply interprets it as part of the Buddha's skillful means to lessen Ānanda's grief. "Why does the Buddha address him up to three time?" Buddhaghosa asks: "In order to lessen his sorrow by putting the blame on him, saying, 'Yours is the wrongdoing; yours is the fault,' [§3.40] when, later on, he was asked by the elder, 'Bhante, may the Blessed One live out the lifespan!'" (DA 2:555). Dhammapāla, too, concurs with Buddhaghosa:

For the Blessed One sees thus, "This person has an extremely affectionate heart towards me. He will, later on, on hearing of the causes of an earth-tremor and my abandoning of my life-formation, ask me to live on for a long time. Then I will put the blame on his head saying, 'Why did you not ask me before?' For human beings are not so troubled with their own faults. Therefore his sorrow will be assuaged."
(UA 325)²⁰⁵

In other words, Ānanda is made to feel regret rather than sorrow at the Buddha's parinirvana, and in this manner, Ānanda's sorrow is assuaged by his regret!²⁰⁶

9.3 THE MEANING OF KAPPA

9.3.1 Kappa as "lifespan"

9.3.1.1 The problem of the Buddha's lifespan is resolved when we better understand the meaning and usage of the word *kappa* (Skt *kalpa*). There is some uncertainty regarding what is meant by "life-span" (*kappa*) here, that is, it could mean any of the following:

- (1) A "world-cycle" or "great cycle" (*mahā,kappa*), that is, one full cycle or age of the world (V 3:109; S 2:185 = It 17; Miln 108; PvA 21), described as comprising of four stages—expanding, stable, contracting, stable—of a pulsating universe (A 2:142);
- (2) A "fortunate cycle" (*bhadda,kappa*), that is, a world-period when there is a Buddha. This is probably one of the four "incalculables" (*asāṅkheyyā*): in this case, it will be the stable period (*vivaṭṭa-t,ṭhāyi,-kappa*) after the universe's re-evolution (*vivaṭṭa,kappa*), which, according to the Commentaries is the opinion of one Mahāsīva Thera.²⁰⁷
- (3) A human "life-span" (*āyu,kappa*). The Milinda,pañha (Miln 141) and the Commentaries²⁰⁸ take *kappa* as meaning a human lifespan, ie, *appaṃ vā bhīyyo ti vutta,vassa,satato atirekaṃ vā*, "'more or less,' that is to say, up to more than a 100 years" (DA 2:554; SA 3:554 UA 323; BA 65). Edgerton, in his *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary* (sv *kalpāvaśeṣam*), too argues for this interpretation.

9.3.1.2 Lifespan is the result of merit and it is clear from the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta that the Buddha could live out his whole lifespan (*kappa*) if he wishes to. The terms *kappa* and *kappāvasesa* in the phrase, *kappaṃ vā tiṭṭheyya kappāvasesaṃ vā* [§§3.3-5] are problematic. It literally translates as "(one) could remain for a cycle or the remainder [what is left] of a cycle"—both "a cycle" and "the remainder of a cycle" effectively refer to the same duration. It is like saying to a guest, "You could remain for this (whole) afternoon or for the rest of this afternoon." *The Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary*, gives this definition:

²⁰⁴ Death can occur in any of 4 ways: (1) through the expiration of the lifespan; (2) through the expiration of the (productive) karmic force; (3) through both (1) & (2); (4) through the intervention of a destructive karma. See Abhs §34 = Abhs:BRS 220.

²⁰⁵ *Passati hi bhagavā "ayaṃ mayi ativiya siniddha,hadayo, so parato bhūmi,cāla,karaṇaṃ ca āyu,saṅkhār'ossajjanaṃ ca sutvā mama cira-t,ṭhānaṃ yācissati, athāhaṃ 'kissa tvaṃ puretaraṃ na yācasī ti tass'eva sīse dosaṃ pātessāmi, sattā ca attano aparādhena na tathā vihaññanti, ten'assa soko tanuko bhavissatī ti* (UA 325). On Ānanda's "extremely affectionate heart," see eg §5.13.

²⁰⁶ See An Yang-Gyu, "Buddhaghosa's view of the Buddha's lifespan," 2000:140-142.

²⁰⁷ DA 2:554; SA 3:251; AA 4:143; UA 323. See PED sv *Kappa*; *Vivaṭṭa*; *Samvatta*.

²⁰⁸ *Ettha ca kappaṃ vā āyu,kappaṃ, tasmīṃ tasmīṃ kāle yaṃ manussānaṃ āyu-p,pamāṇaṃ hoti taṃ paripuṇṇaṃ karonto tiṭṭheyya, kappāvasesaṃ ti: appaṃ vā bhīyyo ti vutta,vassa,satato atirekaṃ vā* (DA 2:554).

kalpāvaśeṣaṃ, adv (= Pali *kappāvaśeṣaṃ*), “more than a kalpa” in the phrase (*kalpaṃ*) *vā ... vā* (*nirādiṣet*, “he might expound”) Lalita, *vistāra* (ed Lefmann, Halle, 1903) 436.6; (*tiṣṭhet*, “would last”) Divy 201.9; 207.1. So Foucaux, apparently supported by Pāli DA 554.32 (on D 2:103.4) *appaṃ vā bhīyyo ti, vutta, vassa, satato* (= *kappaṃ* = *āyu, kappaṃ*) *atirekaṃ vā*, “a little more,” or “in excess of the stated 100 years” (the extreme life of a man, which Pali exegesis takes as the meaning of *kappaṃ* here). So also Tibetan on Mahā Parinirvāṇa Sūtra (ed Waldschmidt, 1950-51) 15.10 = Divy 201.9...

(Adapted & refs expanded in parts)

9.3.1.3 As we have noticed [9a], none of the past Buddhas mentioned has their lifespan remotely reaching a “world-cycle” (*kappa*), or any one of its four stages (*asaṅkheyya kappa*). However, there is much more canonical evidence for taking *kappa* to mean a human life-span. We find this statement in **the Cakka, vatti Sihanāda Sutta** (D 26):

Keep to your pastures, bhikshus, to the haunts of the fathers. If you do so, your life-span will increase....

And what is the length of life for a monk? Here, a monk develops the bases of spiritual power which is the concentration of intention accompanied by effort of will, concentration of energy accompanied by the effort of will, concentration of consciousness accompanied by the effort of will and concentration of mental investigation accompanied by effort of will. By constantly practising these four bases of spiritual power he can, if he wishes, life for a full life-span or for more than the life-span. That is what I call the length of life for a monk. (D 26,28/3:77), SD 36.10

It is clear here that it is not only the Buddha, but any monk who has cultivated “the bases of spiritual power” (*iddhi, pādā*), will be able to live a full life-span or what remains of the longest possible life-span at that time. The bases of spiritual power here refer to the conscious development of psychic skills (*iddhi*), including the knowledge of the destruction of defilements (S 51/5:254-290).

As such, in the phrase “for a full life-span or the remainder of it [§3.3-5],” I understand the former “life-span” (*kappa*) as referring to the *karmic* life-span, ie, as inherited from our karma, and the latter as the natural or “statistical” life-span of the times. In other words, with *iddhi*, we are able to extend our “allotted” years to a *full* life-span (about 100-120 years in the Buddha’s and our own times).

9.3.1.4 Further evidence is found in scriptural common sense, as attested by the fact that many of the arhats—like Ānanda (DhA 2:99) and Mahā Kassapa (Skt Mahā Kāśyapa) (SA 2:173)—are said to live to a full 120 years, though the oldest of them, **Bakkula**, is said to have lived to 160, well over “the remainder” of the full life-span! **The Ghaṭṭa Sutta** (S 21.3/2:276-278) record this interesting conversation between the Buddha’s two chief disciples:

“Avuso,” Sāriputta confesses, “compared to the venerable Mahā Moggallāna, we are like a little piece of gravel compared to the Himalayas, the king of mountains. For the venerable Mahā Moggallāna is of such great spiritual power and might that **if so he wishes he could live on for a (full) cycle** (*kappa*).”²⁰⁹

“Avuso,” replies Moggallāna, “compared to the venerable Sāriputta (in wisdom) we are like a little grain of salt compared to a barrel of salt. For the venerable Sāriputta has been extolled, lauded and praised in many ways by the Blessed One.” (S 2:276 f)

9.3.1.5 The Commentaries record that a certain Mahāsīva Thera was not satisfied with this explanation and held that the Buddha meant to live out this “fortunate aeon” (*bhadda, kappa*) itself (in which five Buddhas have arisen), but could not do so because his body was subject to the laws of old age (DA 2:554; BA 191). In **the Milinda, pañha**, Nāgasena tells king Milinda that “Maharajah, there is no way that one could stop a lifespan that is ending” (*n’atthi mahārāja khīṇ’āyukassa thitīyā kiriyā vā upakkamo vā*, Miln 151), which clearly refers to impending death.

In the Dilemma discussing the Buddha’s own lifespan, Nāgasena, says that “solitary meditation protects one while one is meditating in solitude; it increases the lifespan...” (*paṭisallānaṃ paṭisallīyamānaṃ attānaṃ rak-khati, āyuaṃ vaḍḍheti*,... Miln 139). Curiously, Nāgasena says that *kappāvaśeṣa* (variously translated as “more than the lifespan” or “what remains of a kalpa”) refers to the three months leading to the Buddha’s passing, that

²⁰⁹ Bhikkhu Bodhi remarks here in his notes that although Comy glosses *kappa* as *āyu, kappa*, meaning the full human life span of 120 years (SA 2:235; S:B 822 n387), there seems to be no textual basis for taking *kappa* in this passage as meaning anything other than a cosmic aeon, the full extent of time required for a world system to evolve and dissolve.

is, when he willfully overcomes his serious illness and extends his life until the end of the rains residence [§§2.23-24].

9.3.1.6 **The Kathā,vatthu** (Kvu 456-458) discusses the controverted point “that by psychic power one could live on for a world period” (*iddhi, bālena samannāgato kappam tiṭṭheyyā ti*) against the Mahāsaṅghika. It argues that if one says that such a one could remain for a world-period, then why not say that “one might live on for two, three, four world-periods?” The text also questions what it means to live on for a world-period. The Mahāsaṅghika, committed to the view that lifespan is the result of karma, cannot answer the question whether one’s extended lifespan is the result of psychic power. Could one, through psychic power, live on even if one is dead? Could one use psychic power to make permanent any of the 5 aggregates?²¹⁰ Could one with psychic power prevent his rebirth, or aging, or disease, or dying? As a final argument, the Kathā,vatthu quotes **the Paṭibhoga Sutta**.²¹¹

Bhikkhus, no recluse, nor brahmin, nor deva, nor Māra, nor Brahmā, nor anyone else in the world, can give a guarantee (*paṭibhoga*) against four things.

What are the four?

That what is liable to decay should not decay.

That what is liable to fall ill will not fall ill.

That what is liable to die will not die.

That no fruit should arise from one’s own bad deeds that are defiling, productive of rebirth, fearful, bringing painful results, leading to future birth, decay and death.

Bhikkhus, no recluse, nor brahmin, nor deva, nor Māra, nor Brahmā, nor anyone else in the world, can give a guarantee (*paṭibhoga*) against these four things. (A 4.182/2:172)

As such, concludes the Kathā,vatthu, “it is not right to say that one with psychic power might live on for a world-period” (Kvu 16.6/457). However, it should be noted here that the controversy centres around “psychic power” (*iddhi, bala*) and not “the bases of spiritual power” (*iddhi, pāda*).²¹² It is important to note that although the *iddhi, pādā* lead to the attainment of various psychic powers (*iddhi*),²¹³ it is the mental cultivation or meditation aspects that are directly related to the extension of lifespan, and not the psychic power in themselves.

9.3.2 Kappa as “world-cycle”

9.3.2.1 From these canonical evidences, we can safely say that *kappa* in connection with the Buddha’s life can only mean *āyu, kappa*. However, curiously, Bhikkhu Bodhi, in his translation of **the Cetiya Sutta** (S 51.10/-5:529), favours taking the term as *bhadda, kappa* [fortunate world cycle], that is, a “cosmic aeon.” After mentioning that the Saṃyutta Commentary takes *kappa* here as *āyu, kappa*, Bodhi goes on to say:

Nevertheless, nowhere else in the Nikāyas is *kappa* used in the sense of a normal human life span, and there seems to be no valid reason to ascribe *kappa* here a different meaning from the usual one, ie, a cosmic aeon. Whether the present passage is genuine or an interpolation, and whether meditative success can confer such extraordinary powers, are different questions about which conflicting opinions have been voiced. (S:B 1940 n249)

9.3.2.2 Similarly, another eminent early Buddhism scholar, Rupert Gettin, in his *The Buddhist Path to Awakening* (2001), has argued in agreement with Bhikkhu Bodhi:

²¹⁰ The 5 aggregates (*pañca-k, khandha*) are form (*rūpa*), feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), formations (*saṅkhāra*) and consciousness (*viññāṇa*), the constituents of one’s being. They are all impermanent.

²¹¹ Expanded in **Alabbhanīya Ṭhāna S** (A 5.48) where these points are called “unattainables” (*alabbhanīyāni*), A 5.48/-3:54 @ SD 42,1.

²¹² For a useful discussion, see Gettin, *The Buddhist Path to Awakening*, 2001:94-97. An Yang-Gyu, in his paper, “Buddhaghosa’s view of the Buddha’s lifespan” (2000), mentions only *iddhi* (psychic power) (eg 2000:137) without distinguishing it from *iddhi, pāda* (the bases of spiritual power). For a full study on *iddhi*, see Pm 205-214. See also S:B 1940 n246 & An Yang-Gyu 2000:136-142.

²¹³ On the def of *iddhi*, see (9b)2 above.

I think on balance the text of the *Mahāparinibbāna-sutta* as we have it, in its various recensions,²¹⁴ points towards *mahā-kappa* as being the correct interpretation. A significant factor here is the word *kappāvasesa*. The most likely meaning of this is surely “the remainder of a kappa.”²¹⁵ For someone to say that he can live on “for his lifespan or the remainder of his lifespan” seems not to make very good sense; “remainder of his lifespan” in fact becomes redundant. However if one is thinking of an incalculable aeon [*asaṅkheyya,kappa*], and envisaging someone speaking as some point during that aeon, for him to say that he might live “for an aeon or [at least] the remainder of the aeon” makes rather better sense. Accordingly, in order to give *kappa* the value he thinks it ought to have, Buddhaghosa must ignore the more natural way of taking *kappāvasesa*. So, he says, *kappāvasesa* does not mean “the remainder of a kappa,” it means “a little bit more than a kappa,” that is, more than a man’s normal life-span of a hundred years.²¹⁶ (Gethin 2001:96)

9.3.2.3 Either way—taking *kappa* as a world-cycle or as an incalculable cycle, or taking it as a lifespan—it might be safely said that the Buddha’s lifespan controversy is a late tradition interpolated into the Mahā Parinibbāna, like the controversy over the Buddha’s allowance for the abrogation of the lesser and minor rules [11], “either out of choice or under pressure from within and without” (Dhirasekera 1981:170).

However, a serious doctrine or theological problem arises if we take *kappa* in this context to mean a “world-cycle” or “incalculable cycle.” It easily gives support to the docetic view of the Buddha, which is clearly foreign to early Buddhism. **Docetism** [9h] is the view that the Buddha is an eternal being (or at least one who lives for a world-cycle or an incalculable cycle) and who appears on earth in as a phantom being performing phantom acts to save beings.

9.3.2.4 Despite the sometimes mythical and otherworldly air of the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta—and good scholarship—to render *kappa* as *mahā,kappa* (great cycle)²¹⁷ or *asaṅkheyya,kappa* (incalculable cycle), it stands out incongruously like a sore thumb against the grain of early Buddhism, or as the Kathā,vatthu argues, one might as well say that “he could live on though dead, he could live on although when his time is up!” (*mato tiṭṭheyya, kalaṅkato tiṭṭheyya*, Kvu 456). Forced with a choice between good scholarship and good sense, when the two are disparate, or forced with a choice between the letter or the spirit, I think it is better to choose good sense. Moreover, we have spirit of early Buddhism on our side.

9.4 DID THE BUDDHA DIE ON VESAK DAY?

9.4.1 There is a problem of dates in the Buddha’s life, but before discussing this, let us look at the ancient Indian year. The Pali names of the ancient **Indian calendar** follow Vism 621 and its Ṭikā (based on Ñāṇamoli’s *A Pali-English Glossary of Buddhist Technical Terms*, 1994), with the Sanskrit names and number of days added.²¹⁸

Season	Sub-season	Month: Pali	Sanskrit	Days	Equivalent
Hemanta (cold)	Hemanta	Māga,sira	Mārga,śīrśa	30	Nov-Dec
	(winter)	Phussa	Puṣya or Pauṣa	30	Dec-Jan
	Sisira	Māgha	Maghā	30	Jan-Feb
Gimhāna (heat)	(cool)	Phagguna	Phālguna or Phaggu	30	Feb-Mar
	Vasanta	Citta	Caitra	30	Mar-Apr
	(spring)	Vesākha	Vaiśākha	31	Apr-May
	Gimha	Jeṭṭha	Jyaiṣṭha	31	May-Jun

²¹⁴ Cf Bareau, *Recherches*, 1970-71 2:152. See §5 in this Intro.

²¹⁵ Gethin’s n: “See CPD sv *kappāvasesa*; Monier-Williams, sv *avaśeṣa*. I fail to see that Edgerton (BHSD sv *kalpāvasesa*) has shown that *kappāvasesa* probably means ‘more than a kappa’ as Jaini suggests (BSOAS 21 (1958), p547)” (2001:96 n62).

²¹⁶ Gethin’s n: “[MA] 2:555: *kappāvasesam vā ti appam vā bhiyyo ti vutta-vassa-satato atirekam vā*. See also [SA] 3:251; DA 4:149; UA 322; DAṬ (Be 1961) 3:252. KR Norman has suggested to me that what **Buddhaghosa** may be doing is taking *kappāvasesa* as a *bahuvrīhi* in the sense of ‘[a period of time] having a lifespan as remainder’ (cf adjectival usage of *ardha-śeṣa* and *ardhāvaśeṣa*, qv Monier-Williams)” (2001:96 n63; slightly revised).

²¹⁷ “**Great Cycle**,” *mahā,kappa* (great aeon), sometimes simply *kappa*, ie, one full cycle or age of the world (V 3:109; D 1:14, 3:109; S 2:185 = It 17; A 2:126, 142; Miln 108, 232; DA 1:162; PvA 21), described as comprising of 4 stages—expanding, stable, contracting, stable—of a pulsating universe (A 2:142). For similes on the aeon’s length, see S 2:181; DA 1:164 = PvA 254.

²¹⁸ For the Indian year, see **Ānāpāna,sati S** (M 118.3/3:79) n on Uposatha @ SD 7.13. On the monsoons, see **Vāsi,jaṭa S** (S 22.101.20/3:155) n on “the cold season” @ SD 15.2a.

	(summer)	Āsālha	Āṣāḍha	31	Jun-Jul
	Vassanā	Sāvana	Śrāvāṇa	31	Jul-Aug
Vassāna	(rains)	Poṭṭha,pāda	Proṣṭha,pada or Bhādra,pada	31	Aug-Sep
	(rains)	Sārada	Assa,yuja	30	Sep-Oct
	(autumn)	Kattika	Kārttika	30	Oct-Nov

[Note: The Indian month begins on the first day of the waning moon and ends on the full moon.]

9.4.2 In the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta, the Buddha is recorded to have fallen severely ill on the point of death during the rains residence at the hamlet of Beluva [Beluva,gāmaka]:

Now when the Blessed One had entered the rains retreat, a serious illness arose in him, with severe pains, as if he were about to die. But he endured all this mindfully and fully aware, and without complaining.

Then it occurred to the Blessed One,

“It is not fitting that I should attain parinirvana without addressing my supporters and taking leave of the order of bhikkhus. I must make an effort to ward off this illness and dwell, having determined the life-force.”²¹⁹
(D 16,2.23/2:99)

It appears that Nāgasena (Miln 141) and the Sarvāstivādins take this episode to mean that the Buddha is actually at the point of dying, and so by sheer will power extends his life for *at least* 3 more months (to the end of the rains retreat). Note that no duration is mentioned in the above quotation.

9.4.3 Knowing that it is inappropriate for him to pass away without addressing the order, he consciously extends his lifespan. He will only be able to address the assembled order during **the Pavāraṇā**, marking the end of the rains residence, which will be in the month of Kattikā (October-November).²²⁰

Then, the Blessed One said this to Māra the bad one:

“Be at ease, bad one! It will not be long before the Tathāgata’s parinirvana. With the passing of²²¹ 3 months from now, the Tathāgata shall enter parinirvana.”²²²
(D 16,3.9/2:106), SD 9

The phrase, “be at ease” (*apossukko tvam pāpima hohi*), here, is ironic, bordering on dark humour, as Māra is certainly not someone who is ever “at ease,” but one who is ever restlessly seeking to seduce or at least distract us from goodness, so that we are caught up in worldliness, overwhelmed by our physical senses and mind, which are Māra’s realm.

9.4.4 If it is assumed that the Buddha had extended his life by three months, from his declaration to Māra [§3.9], then, his life-extension act was done at the very beginning of the rains residence. This would mean that the Buddha passed away in Kattikā (October-November). The Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta does not give us any hint of when the appearance of Māra occurred or when the Buddha told Ānanda that he would pass away in 3 months’ time [§3.37] but if we can assume that the latest date for the Buddha’s parinirvana would be 3 months

²¹⁹ *Atha kho Bhagavato etad ahosi: Na kho me tam paṭirūpaṃ yo ’ham anāmantevā upaṭṭhāke anapaloketvā bhikkhu, - saṅgham parinibbāyeyyam. Yan nunā ’ham imam ābādham viriyena paṭippaṇāmetvā jīvita, saṅkhāram adhiṭṭhāya vihareyyan ti* (D 2:119; S 5:262; U 64). Comys however say that the Buddha did not let go of his life-formation like a ball of clay from his hand, but for exactly 3 months he entered upon the attainment of the fruits (*phala, samāpatti*), thinking, “I will not enter upon them for any longer than that” (DA 556; SA 3:253; UA 327). It should be noted, however, that this life-extension is different from the one at the Cāpāla Shrine [§3.3].

²²⁰ Strangely, there is no record of this event in our Sutta.

²²¹ “With the passing of,” *accayena* (D 2:106 = 114 = S 5:262 = A 4:311 = U 64 ≈ Kaccv 277; Moggv 2:26). The phrase, “with the passing of 3 months” can be rendered either way: (1) at the end of 3 months; (2) after 3 months. Could the Buddha be pulling Māra’s legs here, and lived an extra 6 months to pass away the following Vesākha full moon—in which, however, it would appear that the Buddha had extended his life further than 3 months.

²²² *Apossukko tvam pāpima hohi, na ciram tathāgatassa parinibbānam bhavissati, ito tiṇṇam māsānam accayena tathāgato parinibbāyissati ti.*

after the Pavāraṇā, then the Buddha's parinirvana would be during the month of Māgha (January-February). Either way, the Buddha could not have passed away during Vesākha (which is six months after the Pavāraṇā).

9.4.5 Buddhaghosa, probably aware of the discrepancy of dates, assigns this episode to the 10th lunar month before the Buddha's parinirvana (DA 2:547 = SA 3:202). The Saṃyutta Poraṇa Ṭikā says that the Buddha went into "fruition attainment (*phala, samāpatti*) [Vism 23], by which life is vitalized, sustained, prolonged... He entered the attainment with the determination, 'Let the pain not arise for another ten months,' and the pain, suppressed by the attainment, did not arise for another ten months."²²³ If we accept Buddhaghosa's intercalary 10 months, then the Parinirvana would be on Vesak Day (full moon of April-May). The **Sarvāstivāda**, however, as recorded by Xuanzang, maintains the Buddha's parinirvana as falling on the 8th day of the bright fortnight (ie the second half) of Kattikā (October-November),²²⁴ which will be in keeping with the chronology of the sutta.

9.5 WAITING FOR SUPRIYA & SUBHADRA (SANSKRIT ACCOUNTS)

9.5.1 The Sanskrit **Mahā Parinirvāṇa Sūtra**²²⁵ adds an interesting detail. Before the Buddha relinquishes his life-formation (*āyuh, saṃskāra*), he thinks of two persons, namely, Supriya, the king of the Gandharvas,²²⁶ and Subhadra the wanderer, who could be taught by the Buddha himself, gaining spiritual maturity within three months. With this thought, the Buddha goes into the samadhi "by which mastered the forces of *jīvita* (new prolonged life) and rejected the forces of *āyuh* (the existing life force)" (Jaini 2001:192).²²⁷

On this basis, the Sarvāstivādins hold that the three months were indeed an extension of life. There was no need to prolong it further because the two converts would have become his disciples by then. Furthermore, the Buddha did this to show his control over the forces of life and death.²²⁸

9.5.2 While the Pali tradition is silent regarding how the Buddha's extension of life is accomplished, this matter is fully discussed in the Sarvāstivāda. Vasubandhu, in his **Abhidharma,kośa,bhāṣya**, gives several Vaibhāṣika views on it.²²⁹ According to the Vibhāṣā Śāstra, there are two kinds of karma: the *āyur, vipāka, karma*, which at the moment on conception determines the lifespan (*āyuh*), and the *bhoga, vipāka, karma*, that is the aggregate of all past karma, accumulated in the consciousness, continuously yielding its fruits (other than the life-span) during one existence.

9.5.3 A human arhat, having mastered the bases of spiritual power (*ṛddhi, pādā*), can through his resolution, transform the *bhoga, vipāka, karma* into an *āyur, vipāka, karma*. The transformed karma then produces the extended lifespan. And if he wishes to reject his established life-span (*āyuh, saṃskāra*), he does the reverse, by transforming his *āyur, vipāka, karma* into the *bhoga, vipāka, karma*. There is, of course, a problem here in the case of an arhat for whom all new births have ended (no new potential *āyur, vipāka, karma*). Vasubandhu, after listing all such views, concludes with his own view that an arhat could extend or relinquish his lifespan solely through the power of meditation, not of karma.²³⁰

9.6 DID THE BUDDHA COMMIT SUICIDE?²³¹

9.6.1 In chapter 3 of the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta [§3.10], it is said:

Then the Blessed One, at the Cāpāla Shrine, mindfully and fully aware, relinquished his life-formation.²³² ...

²²³ Qu at S:B 1920 n138. BDict: *phala*, as "path-result" or "fruition," denotes those moments of supermundane consciousness which flash forth immediately after the moment of path-consciousness and which, till the attainment of the next higher path, may during the practice of insight (*vipassanā*) still recur innumerable times. If thus repeated, they are called the "attainment of fruition" (*phala, samāpatti*). There are two kinds of *phala, samāpatti*: (1) temporary attainment (*khaṇika, samāpatti*), and (2) attainment in the form of great insight (*mahā vipassanā*). The temporary attainment suppresses pain while one remains in the attainment. As soon as one emerges from the attainment, the pain permeates the body again. The attainment in the form of great insight, however, suppresses pain very well. After emerging from that state, pain rears only after a long time. Buddhaghosa says that the Buddha has attained the temporary attainment before, but this is the first time that his attainment is in the form of great insight (DA 2:547). See (9.2).

²²⁴ Xuanzang [Hsuan-tsang], *Si-yu-ki [Xiyuji]: Buddhist Records of the Western World*, tr S Beal, London, 1884:33.

²²⁵ Ed E Waldschmidt 1950-51.

²²⁶ Not mentioned in the Pali accounts.

²²⁷ *Yannv aham tadrūpān ṛddhyabhisamkārān abhisamkuryām yathā samāhite citte jīvita-samkārān adhiṣṭhāyāyuh-samkārān utsrjeyam* (Mahā Parinirvāṇa S 210; also Divy 203): see Jaini 2001:198 n10.

²²⁸ *Marāṇa, vaśitvā, jñāpanārtham...traimāsyam eva nordhvaṃ vinēyakāryābhāvāt...* (Yaśomitra, *Abhidharma, kośa, vyākhyā* 105). Qu by Jaini 2001:198 n11.

²²⁹ Lous de la Vallée Poussin (tr), *L'Abhidharma-kośa de Vasubandhu*, ch II, kā 10.

²³⁰ For details of this discussion, see Jaini 2001:193-197.

²³¹ A summary, with further evaluation, is found at SD 48.2 (6.2.2.3).

The sage let go of the formation of existence, of life [the remaining lifespan], low and high,
Delighting within and mentally concentrated, he broke the armour-like self-existence.²³³

(D 16,3.10/2:106 f)

Could we regard the Buddha's relinquishment of his life-span as an announcement of suicide?

9.6.2 Then, there is the "problem" of the Buddha's last meal offered by Cunda the smith. The Buddha knows that the food is contaminated or unsuitable for human consumption:

...the Blessed One addressed Cunda the smith:

"Cunda, serve me the *sūkara,maddava*²³⁴ that has been prepared, but serve the order of monks with the other hard and soft foods that have been prepared."²³⁵

"Yes, bhante," Cunda the smith replied in assent to the Blessed One, and he served the Buddha the *sūkara,maddava* that has been prepared, but served the order of monks with the other hard and soft foods that have been prepared.

Then the Blessed One addressed Cunda the smith:

"Cunda, as for the rest of the *sūkara,maddava*, bury it in a pit. Cunda, I can see no one in the world with its devas, Māras and Brahmās, in this generation with its recluses and brahmins, its princes and people who, if they were to eat it, could thoroughly digest it except the Tathāgata."²³⁶

"Yes, bhante," Cunda the smith replied in assent to the Blessed One, and then buried the rest of the *sūkara,maddava* in a pit. (D 16,4.18-19/2:127)

Yet the Buddha knowingly consumes the contaminated food offering.

9.6.3 A Buddha (that is, any fully self-awakened being) has the power to live for a whole lifespan (*kappa*, Skt *kalpa*) of his time or a little more (say up to 160 years),²³⁷ but no Buddha does so because the term is shortened by reason of climate and the food he takes (DA 2:413). In the **Mahāpadāna Sutta** (D 14), the Buddha declares,

My own lifespan now, bhikshus, is trifling and short, quick to pass. One who lives long (here) lives only for more or less a hundred years" (*mayham bhikkhave etarahi appakam āyu-p,pamānam parittam lahusam, yo ciram jīvati so vassa,satam appam vā bhiiyo*). (D 14,7/2:4)

The phrase "more or less a hundred years" (*vassa,satam appam vā bhiiyo*) is stock.²³⁸ However, because the Buddha has mastery of the four bases of spiritual power,²³⁹ he can if he wishes live a little beyond the normal lifespan (*kappāvesa*)²⁴⁰ [§3.3]. No Buddha, however, dies before his dispensation is firmly established [§3.8].

9.6.4 The Commentary to the **Dhanu-g,gaha Sutta**,²⁴¹ which says that the life-formation (*āyu,sañkhāra*) runs faster than the speed at which as man could catch a flying arrow, explains that *āyu,sañkhāra* refers to the physical life-faculty (*rūpa,jīvit'indriya*). This is what that is given up by the Blessed One.

Since the Buddha has awakened to the unconditioned (*asañkhata*), that is, nirvana, he cannot be defined in conditional or relative terms, that is to say, these 4 logical points (Skt *catuṣkoṭi*) do not apply to him: *that the*

²³² See §3.10n below. See S:B 819 n366.

²³³ See §3.10n below.

²³⁴ *Sūkara,maddava*, see Intro (13.2).

²³⁵ See n by John Strong (2001:171) in §4.18n below.

²³⁶ Cf Lamotte 1976:313 f.

²³⁷ The elder **Bakkula** is said to have lived to 160 years (M 124.3/3:125; MA 4:191). If **Yasa Kakaṇḍaka,putta** of the Second Buddhist Council (VA 1:33 ff; Dīpv 4:45 ff; Mahv 4:9 ff) is the same as Yasa "the son of family" (V 1:16 f), converted during the first year of the Ministry, then he would be over 165 years.

²³⁸ D 14.7/ 2:4 = S 4.9/1:108 = 15.20/2:192; qu at DA 2:413.

²³⁹ See §3.3n.

²⁴⁰ See §3.3 below & S 51.10/5:259.

²⁴¹ S 20.6/2:265 f.

*Buddha exists, that the Buddha does not exist, that the Buddha both exists and does not exist, and that the Buddha neither exist nor not exist.*²⁴²

9.6.5 On a more mundane level, we can assert that the Buddha places a high value of life, as clearly evident from the first of the 5 precepts (against taking of life) (D 3:235; A 3:203, 275; Vbh 285). In fact, while at Beluva (D 2:99), he falls seriously ill, on the point of death, and his thought is that of getting well:

Now when the Blessed One has entered the rains retreat, a serious illness arose in him, with severe pains, as if he were about to die. But he endured all this mindfully and fully aware, and without complaining.

Then it occurred to the Blessed One,

“It is not fitting that I should attain parinirvana without addressing my supporters and taking leave of the order of monks. I must make an effort to ward off this illness and dwell, having determined the life-force.”
(D 16,2.23/2:99)

It appears that Nāgasena (Miln 141) and the Sarvāstivādins take this episode to mean that the Buddha is actually at the point of dying, and by sheer will power extends his life for *at least* 3 more months (to the end of the rains retreat). Note that no duration is mentioned here.²⁴³

9.6.6 The Commentaries however say that the Buddha did not let go of his life-formation like a ball of clay from his hand, but for exactly 3 months he entered upon the attainment of the fruits (*phala, samāpatti*), thinking, “I will not enter upon them for any longer than that” (DA 556; SA 3:253; UA 327).²⁴⁴

Just as the unawakened is “dead” to awakening, even so the awakened is “dead” due to his being unawakened. The awakened and the unawakened are worlds apart. While the unawakened habitually fall back into a cycle of deaths, the awakened are beyond death. As such, it is meaningless to speak of an awakened one committing suicide since he is already “dead” to the world.²⁴⁵ For upon awakening, the Buddha and the arhats, transcend life and death as we know them. In **the Anurādha Sutta** (S 22.86), the Buddha declares to Anurādha:

But, Anurādha, when the Tathāgata is **neither truly nor actually [reliably] to be found here and now**,²⁴⁶ is it fitting for you to declare: “Avusos, when a Tathāgata is describing a Tathāgata—the highest person, the supreme person, who has attained the highest—he describes him apart from these four cases:

‘The Tathāgata exists after death,’

‘The Tathāgata does not exist after death,’

‘The Tathāgata both exists and does not exist after death,’

‘The Tathāgata neither exists nor not exist after death.’?”

“No, bhante.”

“Excellent, excellent, Anurādha! As before, Anurādha, so too now, I declare only suffering and the end of suffering.”²⁴⁷
(S 22.86/3:118 f), SD 21.13

9.6.7 In **the Anurādha Sutta** (S 22.86), the Buddha declares to Anurādha that “when the Tathāgata is not being apprehended by you as true and real here in this very life,”²⁴⁸ it is not fitting for anyone to describe the Tathāgata in terms of the states of truth: as existing, as not existing, as both, or as neither.²⁴⁹

²⁴² KN Jayatilleke, in his classic work, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, (1963), says: “Until recently it was believed in the Western world that Aristotelian logic was the only logic and that it reflected the structure of reality but, with the discovery of many-valued logics by [J] Lucasiewicz and [N] Lobachevsky, this view is no longer universally held. This means that our choice of a logical system is to some extent arbitrary and dependent on the needs and nature of our discussion” (1963:350).

²⁴³ But see §3.9.

²⁴⁴ For a different opinion, see Jaini 1958 (2001:193). It should be noted, however, that this life-extension is different from the one at the Cāpāla Shrine [§3.3].

²⁴⁵ See John Strong’s interesting remark on the arhat has both living and dead, 1992:86-90 & “Was Channa an arhat when he killed himself?” **Chann’ovāda S** (M 114), SD 11.12 (5).

²⁴⁶ *Ettha ca te Anurādha diṭṭhe va dhamme saccato thetato tathāgato anupalabhiyamano*. Essentially, this statement means that the Buddha is beyond predication: he cannot really be defined in worldly terms. In Buddhist terms, karmic constructions (karma and fruition) do not apply to the Buddha. Bhikkhu Bodhi renders this crucial sentence as: “But, Anurādha, when the Tathāgata is not apprehended by you as real and actual here and in this very life,....” See S:B 1080 n165. On *saccato thetato* (D 1:4; M 1:8, 179, 2:109; S 3:112, 118, 4:384), see Harvey 1983: 45 & 52 n18.

²⁴⁷ *Pubbe cāham Anurādha etarahi ca dukkhañ c’eva paññāpemi dukkhassa ca nirodhan’ti*.

²⁴⁸ Be Ce Ke Se: *Diṭṭheva dhamme saccato tathato tathāgato anupalabhiyamāno*; Ee *Diṭṭheva dhamme saccato thetato tathāgato anupalabhiyamāno*. Cf **Alaggadūpama S** (M 22): “And bhikshus, since in truth and in fact, one can find neither
<http://dharmafarer.org>

9.6.8 There is an ancient Indian religious tradition of *mahā,samādhi* or “final samadhi,” where the saint will voluntarily pass away in deep meditation.²⁵⁰ It is possible that the tradition started with the Buddha, or it could have been practised even before his time. Although this is not, strictly speaking, a Buddhist practice, such a death as the Buddha will earn his great respect and holiness. This is because he is able to predict or foresee his death. Apparently, such predictions of impending death by a saint was (and is) not uncommon in India. [13.2(5)]

9.7 IS THE BUDDHA STILL LIVING?

9.7.1 Amongst many latter-day Buddhists, there is the belief that the Buddha (or Buddhas) could still be contacted, and that he (or they) is/are still teaching out of his great compassion—a notion that some scholars have asserted as being

... particularly significant in the origins of some of the Mahāyāna literature.... One, and perhaps one of the few defining dimensions of Mahāyāna Buddhism is a vision and understanding of the Buddha as *not really dead but still around*. When stated and accepted this understanding entailed that Buddhism itself had the potential to change in the light of a continuing revelation.

(Paul Williams 2000:108-111; original italics)

Williams goes on to show that the practice of “the recollection of the Buddha” (*buddhānu,ssati*, Skt *buddh-ānusmṛti*) is found in early Buddhism. He cites the case of **Piṅgiya**, who says that his old age prevents him from visiting the Buddha, but through his devotion and “with constant vigilance, it is possible for me to see him with my mind as clearly as with my eyes, night or day” (Sn 1144).²⁵¹

9.7.2 In the **Visuddhi,magga**, Buddhaghosa describes the recollection of the Buddha in detail.²⁵² The recollection of the Buddha often involves “visualising the Buddha,” which sometimes leads to visions of the Buddha. Such a practice is apparently popular from an early time, and one of its results is that the meditator feels as if he is in the presence of the Buddha himself (Harrison 1978; Williams 1989:30, 217-220).

What we have here [the Pratyupanna Sūtra] is in all probability a justification in advance (if not also retrospectively) for the sudden appearance of Mahāyāna sūtras, ie “dharma hitherto unheard.” However, it is by no means to be regarded as necessarily a cynical attempt to confer a specious authenticity on the literary confections of followers of the Mahāyāna. It involves rather the proposition that meditation is a legitimate means whereby the eternal Buddha-principle may continue to reveal religious truths to those fit to receive them, and thus throws an interesting light on the composition of Mahāyāna sūtras in general. It is no doubt in this sense, that of a channel of inspiration and revelation, that the author of the *Pratyutpanna-sūtra* advocated the inclusion of the *pratyutpanna-samādhi* amongst the religious practices of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

(Paul Harrison 1978:54)

It seems certain that a text like the *Pratyutpanna Sūtra* (and perhaps other early Mahāyāna texts associated with Pure Lands and *buddhānusmṛti*) describes practices which can lead to revelatory visions, and the *Pratyupanna Sūtra* itself advocates the promulgation of the teachings thus received.... Indeed the Buddhist tradition in general has tended to be very cautious, even dismissive, concerning visions seen in meditation.... But certainly some people took these revelations seriously, and those who took them seriously were sometimes great scholars. It is often said that the standard view of early Buddhism is that after the death of a Buddha he is beyond reference or recall, significantly and religiously dead. From such a perspective the idea of seeing a living Buddha in meditation is problematic. One way round this would be to claim that the Buddha visualized is simply a Buddha who has for one reason or another not yet died.

(Paul Williams 2000:109 f)

self nor what belongs to a self” (*attani ca bhikkhave attaniye ca saccato thetato anupalabbhamāne*, M 22.25/1:138,5-6 @ SD 3.13) & “one thus gone, I say, is untraceable even here and now” (*diṭṭh’evāhaṃ bhikkhave dhamme tathāgatam ananuvejjo ti vadāmi*, M 22.36/1:140,6-7).

²⁴⁹ S 22.86/3:118 f @ SD 22.13. See also **The person in Buddhism @ SD 29.6b (8.1).**

²⁵⁰ See eg Sushila Blackman 1997.

²⁵¹ Williams 2000:217.

²⁵² Vism 7.2-67/198-213.

9.7.3 A professional scholar, **Gregory Schopen**, has argued, on archaeological and ethnographical grounds, that the canonical texts do not always (more often do not) reflect the actual common practice amongst both the lay and the ordained in ancient and mediaeval India.²⁵³ Schopen, for example, says that the Buddha's relics preserved, after his passing, in stupas, were felt to be the Buddha himself. The Buddha was believed to be present in his relics and even in places associated with his life (Schopen 1987a, 1990, 1994).

His ideas are not new, for decades before, André Bareau has said that even “before the beginning of our era... the *stūpa* is more than the symbol of the Buddha, it is the Buddha himself” (*La construction*, 1960: 269).²⁵⁴ Through his relics, the Buddha was also treated as if in some sense present in the monastery, and was treated by the monastery and apparently by the community as a “legal person” with inalienable property rights.

9.7.4 Schopen further notes that the relics are “infused with morality, infused with concentration, wisdom, release and knowledge and vision” (1994:47). These are qualities (*dhamma*) often also referred to as “the body of dharmas” (*dhamma, kāya*; Skt *dharmā, kāya*) in certain Buddhist philosophical texts (Paul Williams 1989:171).

Thus texts that say that one should take refuge not in the physical body of the Buddha but in his *dharma, makāya*, his Buddha-qualities could be said to be indicating not just the need to become a Buddha through expressing in oneself those qualities constitutive of a Buddha (as previously thought). They could be indicating also the continuing presence of the Buddha, even though dead, his presence as the *dharma, makāya* pervading his relics. Transcending death, the Buddha is present in the monastery still.

(Paul Williams 2000:258 n16)

9.7.5 The desire to meet the Buddha is still common today, especially amongst the followers of the faith-centred “Pure Land” or mantric Amitābha tradition. If one is unable to see the Buddha in this life in meditation, then one could after death be reborn in his presence in the Pure Land where he still dwells. The earliest Pure Lands are modelled on the heavens. Pure Land devotees believe, through recollecting the Buddha or even by merely reciting his name (*Namaḥ Amitābhāya*), they will be reborn in his Pure Land, Sukhāvati.²⁵⁵

9.7.6 There is always the possibility, even likelihood, in the past and even today, that certain monks, inspired by their visions in the practice of *buddhānussati* (Skt *buddhānussmṛti*), regard them as genuine and that new truths or new teachings have been revealed to them. Such visions are often associated by the faithful (especially the laity) with magical power.

Paul Harrison writes that the meditation and associated powers would have given Mahāyānists an edge in the crucial factor amongst the religious in ancient India—competition for scarce resources. Essentially, this is a competition for donations from supporting non-religious lay believers eager for religious merit and quick answers to personal prayers, and even access to magical power and miraculous results (Harrison 1995:66).

On the other hand, Harrison adds, the Mahāyāna is “the work of a predominantly monastic order of meditators engaged in strenuous ascetic practices, people asserting, in short, that the Buddha is to be found in and through the realization of the Dharma, not in the worship of relics” (1995:62).

9.8 IS THE BUDDHA REALLY DEAD?

9.8.1 It is clear that when the Buddha's body has been cremated, his physical existence is no more. What about his mind. Is it possible that a part of his mind (*mano*) survives death? **Frank J Hoffman** asks, “What of the possibility that X may exist in part? In the context X is the Tathāgata and this view as applied to the Tathāgata may be understood as the view that part of the Tathāgata survives death and part does not” (1987:21). However, this view is clearly rejected by the Buddha as evident from **the Mahā Taṇha, saṅkhaya Sutta** (M 38) where Sāti is rebuked for holding that the Buddha teaches that “it is the same consciousness, not another, that runs and flows through samsara” (M 38.2-3/1:256 f).²⁵⁶

9.8.2 As such, the belief that the Buddha both exists and does not exist after death is clearly a mistaken one. Hoffman explains that what is meant by the deathless quality of nirvana when applied to Tathāgata is simply to “deny that the word *mata* (‘dead,’ opposite of *amata*) applies to the Tathāgata,” in the sense that it is impossible for him to experience death, since to experience something means that he be alive (1987: 114 f). **K R Norman**, however, puts it differently:

The epithets *amata*, *ajāta*, *ajara*, etc, when applied to *nibbāna*, mean “where there is no death, no birth, no old age,” as opposed to *samsāra*, where there is death, birth and old age. Someone who has gained

²⁵³ See esp his anthology, Schopen, *Bones, Stones, and Buddhist Monks*, 1997.

²⁵⁴ Cf Schopen, “What’s in a name,” 1996:70 f.

²⁵⁵ See **Mahā Sudassana S** (D 17) + SD 36.12 (5); also Paul Williams 2000:110 f, 175, 181-185.

²⁵⁶ See Norman 1991:256 f, 261. See also SD 6.15 (2004).

nibbāna has left *samsāra* and is no longer subject to death, birth and old age. The Buddha, for the most part, describes *nibbāna* in the form of negatives: it is the opposite of *samsāra*. The Tathāgata cannot experience death in *nibbāna* because there is no death there, because there is no birth or old age there.

(Norman 1991:7 = 1993:261 f)

9.8.3 Peter Harvey, in “The nature of the Tathāgata” (1983), makes a radical suggestion that the Buddha’s consciousness, although described as “unestablished” (*appatiṭṭhita*), “outlasts death.” He bases his argument on a simile in **the Atthi,rāgo Sutta** (S 12.64) where it is said that *in the absence of a wall, earth or water, the sunbeam falls nowhere*²⁵⁷ (which Harvey presumably takes to mean that it remains in space undetected). Apparently, Harvey is himself not certain of the idea: he was exploring such the possibility without making present any definite thesis. In fact, he is quite cautious about his suggestion:

The death of a Tathāgata is simply the cessation of the dukkha-khandhas. No real satta or atta or “I am” us destroyed, as such things do not exist. Again, the Tathāgata is not destroyed and cut off, as the end of the khandhas is not his end, and does not make him “*na hoti*” [does not become]. On the other hand, it cannot be said that a Tathāgata “becomes (*hoti*)” after death, as this would mean that he arose in some form of rebirth or “becoming (*bhava*) [existence].” Again it cannot be said that he “becomes” in an attenuated fashion (or that part of him becomes and part is cut off).

Nevertheless, a Tathāgata does, in some atemporal sense, exist (*atthi*). This is because the **unsupported nibbanic viññāṇa**, which is his inner nature, or with which he is closely associated, still exists after death. Such a Tathāgata is one “aspect” of the dhamma “seen” at Stream-entry and “won” at enlightenment.

... This interpretation is not to be taken as implying that a Tathāgata is no different from a metaphysical atta [self or soul], as a Tathāgata lacks the essential aspect of I-ness crucial to an atta, and is not something that exists in a person prior to his enlightenment. Similarly, though my interpretation puts stress on a certain form of viññāṇa, it is clearly different from a full-blown *Vijñānavāda* [sic], in which everything turns out to be *vijñāna*. (Harvey 1983:50; cf 1995:24 f; emphasis and diacritics added)

9.8.4 This sunbeam simile of **the Atthi,rāgo Sutta** refers to the arhat’s consciousness as being *appatiṭṭhita*, “unestablished,” that is, finds no support to rest on. **Bhikkhu Bodhi** clarifies the simile in this manner:

... I think it would be wrong to interpret the sutta as saying that after his parinibbāna the arahant’s consciousness persists in some mode that can only be described as unestablished. The present passage [S 12.64.17-24/2:103 f] is clearly speaking of the arahant’s consciousness *while he is still alive*. Its purport is not that an “unestablished consciousness” remains after the arahant’s parinibbāna, but that his consciousness, being devoid of lust, does not “become established in” the four nutriments [edible food, sense-contact, mental volition, consciousness] in any way that might generate a future existence.

(S:B 775 n174)

9.8.5 Harvey’s explanation (1953: 50) is helpful here, provided we remember his caveat in the last paragraph of this excerpt. There is always the problem of language in trying to express the inexpressible. Just because a word exists does not mean that it refers to a real thing: one cannot define something into being. One could say “I believe in unicorns” but it does not mean that they exist. Or, one could say, “The house is not built yet.” Here “house” is clearly non-existent. Similarly, the word “consciousness” is used after the fact to describe a person’s state *after* he is awakened, when what used to exist before (“consciousness”), ceases to be after he passes away.

9.8.6 Even Buddhaghosa sometimes stumbles (or we stumble over him) here where, in his Majjhima Commentary on the sentence “where consciousness is without attribute, without end, luminous” in **the Brahma,ni-mantanika Sutta** (M 49,25/1:329),

takes its subject to be *nibbāna*, called “consciousness” (*viññāṇam*), in the sense that “it can be cognized” (*vijānitabbam*). This derivation is hardly credible, since nowhere in the Nikāyas is Nibbāna described as consciousness, nor is it possible to derive an active noun from the gerundive.

²⁵⁷ S 12.64/2:103 f.

(Bodhi, M:ÑB 1249 n513)

The mentioned phrase also forms the first line of this stanza from **the Kevaḍḍha Sutta** (D 11):

²⁵⁸Where consciousness is without attribute,²⁵⁹ without end, luminous²⁶⁰—
There earth, water, fire, air find no footing.
There long and short, small and great, fair and foul,
Name and form are totally stopped.
With the cessation of consciousness all this stop.²⁶¹ (D 11,85/1:223), SD 1.7

9.8.7 Some useful understanding might come from a discussion of Harvey’s “unsupported nibbāna viññāna” (*appatiṭṭhitam viññānam*)²⁶² (1983:50) quoted above in the light of the Kevaḍḍha Sutta stanza above. The verb *patitiṭṭhati* usually means “‘to become established,’ that is, attached, principally on account of craving and other defilements” (S:B 342 n2). The arhat is said to pass away “with consciousness unestablished” (*appatiṭṭhitena viññānena...parinibbuto*, S 4.23/1:122), that is, without any kind of support for consciousness to occur. **The Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā** or Diamond Sutra is echoes this understanding:

Whosoever, Subhūti, were to say that the Tathāgata goes or comes, or stands²⁶³ or sits, or lies down—he, Subhūti, does not understand what I have taught. And why is that? “The Tathāgata,” Subhūti, is one who had not gone anywhere or who has come from anywhere. Therefore, he is called “the Tathāgata, the arhat [worthy], the fully self-awakened one.”

(*Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā*, ed Edward Conze. Rome, 1974:59)

9.8.8 The Aggi Vaccha,gotta Sutta (M 72) has the famous fire simile by which the Buddha explains that when a fire is extinguished it goes nowhere: it is just that the conditions for a fire to occur are no more present (M 72.19/1:487).²⁶⁴ Or, as the **Saṅgajāna S 1** (S 12.53) puts it: when the nutriment or fuel (*āhāra*) is exhausted, the lamp will go out (S 12.53/2:86). The word *nibbuta* that describes one who has gained nirvana is also used of a fire that has gone out.²⁶⁵

²⁵⁸ *Viññānam anidassanam anantam sabbato pabham: | ettha āpo ca paṭhavī tejo vāyo ca na gādhati | ettha dīghaṇ ca rassaṇ ca anuṇ thūlam subhāsubham | ettha nāmaṇ ca rūpaṇ ca asesam uparujjhati | Viññānassa nirodhena etth’etaṃ uparujjhati.* The first line occurs in **Brahma,nimantanika S** (M 49.25/1:329). See REA Johansson, *The Psychology of Nirvana*, London, 1969:71 f.

²⁵⁹ “Without attribute [signless],” *anidassana*, “invisible.” Ñāṇananda renders it as “non-manifesting” (*Concept and Reality in Early Buddhist Thought*, Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1971:59). See Bodhi’s important n at M:ÑB 1249 n513.

²⁶⁰ “Luminous,” *pabham*, vl *paham*. In his Majjhima tr n, Ñāṇamoli takes *pabham* to be the negative present participle of *pabhavati*—*apabham*—the negative-prefix *a* elided in conjunction with *sabbato*: “The sense can be paraphrased freely by ‘not predicating being in relation to ‘all,’” or ‘not assuming of ‘all’ that it is or is not in an absolute sense” (M:ÑB 1249 n513). “But,” argues Bodhi. “if we take *pabham* as ‘luminous,’ which seems better justified, the [Majjhima] verse links up with the idea of the mind as being intrinsically luminous [A 1:10]” (id). See D:W 557 n241. Cf A 1.10 where the mind is said to by nature radiant (*pabhassara*) & A 2:139 where the light of wisdom (*paññā,pabha*) is called the best of lights. See Bodhi’s important n at M:ÑB 1249 n513.

²⁶¹ The Buddha makes a similar statement by way of an Udāna (inspired utterance) on the Parinirvana of Bāhiya Dāru-cīriya: “Where water, earth, fire and air find no footing, | There neither brightness burns nor sun shines | There neither moon gleams nor darkness reigns. | When a sage, a brahmin, through wisdom has known this by himself | Then he is freed from form and formless, from joy and pain.” (U 9). A similar verse is found at S 1.69/1:15, and a similar teaching is given by Mahā Cunda to Channa 4.87/4:59. On this verse (D 11,85) see D:W 557 n242 + [9.9] below.

²⁶² S 3:53; *appatiṭṭhitena viññānena*, S 1:122.

²⁶³ *Api tu khalu punaḥ Subhūte yaḥ kaścid eva vadet: Tathāgato gacchati vā āgacchati vā tiṣṭhati vā niṣidati vā śayyāṇ vā kalpayati, na me Subhūte sa bhāṣitasya artham ājānāti. Tat kasya hetoḥ? Tathāgata iti Subhūte ucyate na kvacid,gato na kutaścid āgataḥ. Tenōcyate Tathāgato ’rhan samyaksambuddha iti (Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā, ed & tr Edward Conze. Rome: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1974:59).*

²⁶⁴ See SD 6.14 (2004).

²⁶⁵ As in *aggi anāhāro* (a fire without fuel), M 1:147; Sn 19; fig combined with *sīti,bhūta* (become cool), V 1:8; M 1:431; A 2:208 = D 3:233 = Pug 56, 61; A 4:410, 5:65; Sn 593, 707; Pv 1.8.7; *anupādāya nibbuta* (cool without any more fuel), S 2:279; A 1:162, 4:290 = Dh 414 = Sn 638.

9.8.9 In his article, “On the Problem of Nirvāṇa,” **F Otto Shrader** has noted the ancient Indian belief that “an expiring flame does not really go out, but returns into the primitive, pure, invisible state of fire it had before its appearance as visible fire” (1905-05:167).²⁶⁶ In his paper on “Death and the Tathāgata,” Norman concludes:

So it is with an individual who has gained *nibbāna*. His state cannot be described any more than the state of a fire that has gone out can be described,²⁶⁷ and the question about his future arising is met by the statement that it is not appropriate to speak of him as arising or not arising, or as both, or as neither.²⁶⁸ Nothing can be said about a tathāgata after death, because if whatever reason or basis there might be for a description of him as embodied, disembodied, etc, should cease completely, how could he be described?²⁶⁹ The Buddha was right to insist that the religious life does not depend on answers for such questions. (Norman 1991:8 =1993:262 f)

9.8.10 This teaching of conditionality and unconditionality, when clearly understood, frees one from the need of other ways of understanding the nature of the Buddha. The Mahāsaṅghika,²⁷⁰ for example, held a docetic view of the Buddha (*lokottara, vāda*). **Docetism** is the wrong view that the Buddha does not have a real or natural body during his life on earth but only an apparent or phantom one. The Mahāsaṅghika Lokottara, vāda (“Supramundane School,” also called Eka, vyavahāra, “One-utterance School”),²⁷¹ a branch of the Mahāsaṅghika, taught that a Buddha in reality is endowed with a supermundane (*lokottara*) nature, omniscience, limitless power and eternal life. It also taught the docetic doctrine that any physical manifestation or actions on earth undertaken by a Buddha are merely appearances or illusory projections performed to save beings. Although not much of Mahāsaṅghika literature is extant (except for the Mahāvastu and their Bhikṣuṇī Vinaya), the ideas of this school seem to have influenced the development of Mahāyāna Buddhism, for example, the Trikāya doctrine.²⁷²

9.9 IMMORTAL SAINTS. Although the notion of immortality, or at least, the ability to live for a world-cycle (or beyond), is mentioned, in the Mahā, in connection with the Buddha, many early saints were regarded to be still alive today, for example, awaiting the advent of the next Buddha, Metteyya (Skt Maitreya). An interesting case in point is the second most important monk after the Buddha, that is, Mahā Kassapa (Skt Mahā Kāśyapa). Although the Commentaries say that Mahā Kassapa was 120 years old at the time of the First Council,²⁷³ Nyanaponika remarks that this chronology is hardly plausible, “for it would mean that he was forty years older than the Buddha and thus already an old man of at least 75 at their first meeting” (Nyanaponika & Hecker, 1997:384 n17).

²⁶⁶ Shrader’s fn: *Vahner yathā yoni-gatasya mūrtir na dṛṣyate n’aiva ca liṅga-nāsaḥ...* = As a form of fire...is not seen nor its seed destroyed [Norman] (Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad 1.13); cf Miln 327 f (where is nirvana stored?). See also Norman 1991:262 f.

²⁶⁷ **Aggi Vaccha, gotta S** (M 72): *Sace pana taṃ Vaccha evaṃ puccheyya: yo te ayaṃ purato aggo nibbuto co aggī ito katamaṃ disaṃ gato, puratthimaṃ vā pacchimaṃ vā uttaraṃ vā dakkhiṇaṃ vā, evaṃ puṭṭho tvaṃ vaccha kinti vyākareyyāsi ti. Na upeti bho Gotamo* (M 1:487).

²⁶⁸ **Aggi Vaccha, gotta S** (M 72): *Evaṃ, vimutta, citto pana bho gotamo bhikkhu kuhiṃ upapajjati ti kho vaccha na upeti...na upapajjati ti kho vaccha na upeti...upapajjati ca na ca upapajjati ti kho vaccha na upeti...n’eva upapajjati na na upapajjati ti kho vaccha na upeti* (M 1:486).

²⁶⁹ **Sabhiya Kaccāna S** (S 44.11): *Yo ca vaccha hetu yo ca paccayo paññāpanāya rūpī ti vā arūpī ti vā saññī ti vā asaññī ti vā n’eva saññī nāsaññī ti vā, so ca hetu so paccayo sabbena sabbam sabbathā sabbam aparisesaṃ nirujjhetvā, kena naṃ paññāpayamāno paññāpeyya rūpī vā ti...nāsaññī ti vā* (S 4:402).

²⁷⁰ That is, the majority school that broke away from the Sthaviras (Elders) after the Second Council (c100-110 AB) but probably before the Third Council (c350 BCE). See *Dictionary of Buddhism*: Mahāsaṅghika.

²⁷¹ On the Mahāsaṅghikas and the Lokottaravāda, see Paul Williams, *Mahāyāna Buddhism*, 1989:16-20. See also *Dictionary of Buddhism*: Lokottara-vāda.

²⁷² See E Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism*, 1988a:622-623-625 & P Williams, *Mahāyāna Buddhism*, 1989: 167-175. See *Dictionary of Buddhism*: trikāya. On the Buddha’s deification & immortality, see **How Buddhism became Chinese @ SD 40b.3 (3.3)**.

²⁷³ VA 4-30 (tr NA Jayawickrama, *The Inception of Discipline*, 1962: 27); DA 2:413, 3:897; MA 4:114; SA 2:130; AA 2:10.

It is said that throughout his spiritual life he had not lain on a bed, that is, he slept in a sitting posture.²⁷⁴ According to Mahāyāna sources (such as Xuanzang's Xiyuji), it is said that Kāśyapa did not die. He still dwells in the **Kukkuṭa, pāda Giri** (Chicken's Foot Mountain) deep in samadhi, awaiting the arrival of Maitreya Buddha.²⁷⁵ A tooth of Mahā Kāśyapa's, according to the Cūḷavaṃsa, is enshrined in the Bhīma, titha Vihāra in Sri Lanka (Cuv 85.81).

There is a Mahāyāna tradition that when the Buddha passed away, he entrusted the care of his teachings to a group of 16 great arhats and their disciples. The Buddha instructed these forest-dwelling (*āraṇya, vāsi*) saints to make themselves available as recipients of offerings so that the donors might gain religious merit (Skt *puṇya*). In compliance, these arhats have extended their lives indefinitely through magical powers (*ṛddhi*) and are still accessible for those in need.

This tradition is found in the Chinese translations of a number of Indian texts, notably **the Nandi, mitrāvādāna**, translated by Xuanzang in the 7th century. **The 16 great arhats** in the Sanskrit tradition are Piṇḍola Bhāradvāja, Kanaka, vatsa, Subinda, Nakula, Bhadra, Kālīka, Vajraputra, Śvapāka, Panthaka, Rāhula, Nāgasena, Inḡada, Vana, vāsi, Ajita and Cūla, panthaka (Dictionary of Buddhism, 2003:270). In popular Mahāyāna and ethnic Buddhism, such saints are often viewed as being immortal and having some kind of apotropaic (luck-bestowing) and healing powers.²⁷⁶

9.10 WHY THE BUDDHA DIES AFTER EMERGING FROM THE 4TH DHYANA²⁷⁷

9.10.1 The Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta (D 16) records how just before his passing away, the Buddha enters the 9 "successive abodes" (*anupubba, vihāra*) in direct and reverse order, and finally passing utterly away after rising from the fourth dhyana [§§6.8+9]. There are at least 6 related explanations why **the Buddha passes away immediately upon emerging from the 4th dhyana** rather than in any other way.

The first two reasons have to do with his own body, which is form-based [9.10.2]. The third reason has to do with his mastery of dhyana [9.10.3]; the fourth reason, with the nature of his awakening [9.10.4], fifthly, with the uniqueness of cessation [9.10.5]; and sixthly, with the Buddha's own re-discovery of the 8 dhyanas (or attainments) [9.10.6].

9.10.2 The Buddha's physical body

9.10.2.1 (1) The Buddha still has a physical body, and the formless dhyanas do not provide any avenue out of samsara, serving only as highest states of meditative bliss *within* samsara. Hence, we see the pre-eminence of the 4 form dhyanas for the Buddhists.²⁷⁸

9.10.2.2 (2) A more difficult explanation depends on our understanding of the nature of the Buddha's body, which lacks the aggregates of clinging, meaning that he has no more fuel for rebirth. Hence, in our understanding, his body simply ceases to function, and since it is still form-based (the physical form remains while the 5 physical senses cease to function), it passes away in the form sphere rather than in the formless sphere or in a state of cessation.

9.10.2.3 The 4th dhyana is the lowest of the 8 dhyanas that is designated a state of "mental freedom" (*ceto, vimutti*). None of the first three dhyana is ever designated so. **The Saṅgīti Sutta** (D 33), in its listing of the 9 progressive cessations (*anupubba, nirodha*) states that "with the attainment of the 4th dhyana, in-and-out-breathing stops,"²⁷⁹ which means the cessation of all physical activity.²⁸⁰ Once it ceases here, and the body does not regain consciousness, it passes away completely without ever revitalizing itself, and will never take a new birth.

9.10.3 (3) The Buddha's mastery of dhyana

9.10.3.1 According to **the Jhānābhīṅṅā Sutta** (S 16.9), the Buddha can easily attain and remain in the 4 dhyanas and the 4 formless attainments.²⁸¹ The Buddha, in other words, is a master of dhyana. This meditative mastery is evident in the Buddha even in his last moments. But to the unawakened, death is perhaps the most fearful or uncertain of experiences. The same self-mastery is also shown by the Buddha when he deliberately gives up his life-formations [§3.9-10].

²⁷⁴ DA 2:413, 3:736; AA:SHB 2:396.

²⁷⁵ Beal 1884 2:142 f.; Lamotte 1988:206.

²⁷⁶ See **Arhats who became Bodhisattvas** @ SD 27.6b.

²⁷⁷ See also SD 48.2 (3.7) The Buddha's last moments.

²⁷⁸ I have asked a number of leading forest monks, but they say that they do not know the reason for the attainment-sequence in which the Buddha passes away. For **Buddhaghosa's views**, see DA 594 f = Yang-Gu AN (tr), *The Buddha's Last Days*, 2003:185-187.

²⁷⁹ **Saṅgīti S** (D 33): *Catuttha-j, jhānam samāpannessa assāsa, passāsā miruddhā honti* (D 33/3:266).

²⁸⁰ **Cūḷa Vedalla S** (M 44): The in-and-out breaths are bodily formations (*assāsa, passāsā kāya, saṅkhāro*, M 44, 15.2/-1:301), SD 40a.9.

²⁸¹ S 16.9/210-214 @ SD 98.7.

9.10.3.2 The Buddha's final progressive attaining of the 9 progressive abodes (*anupubba vihāra*)—the 4 form dhyana, the 4 formless attainments, and cessation²⁸²—in both forward and backward orders is not a detour or a tortuous procedure, but shows the Buddha's full self-mastery even in his very last moments. The Buddha's passing away is often beautifully depicted in sculpture and painting, where the Buddha lies lion-like on his right side, as the unawakened (and even nonhumans and animals) mourn his passing. [Fig 6.9]

9.10.3.3 The Buddha not only has mastered the 4 form dhyanas and the 4 formless attainments, but also the cessation of perception and feelings [9.10.5]. This is significant in at least two ways: (1) this attainment is found only in the Buddha's teaching; and (2) only arhats and non-returners can attain to this state. The Buddha himself has attained cessation during his great awakening [9.10.4].

9.10.3.4 Indeed, the Buddha is recorded to have attained dhyana even when very young. **The Mahā Sacca-ka Sutta** (M 36) records the Buddha as recalling that “when my father the Sakya was occupied, while sitting under the jambu tree,” he attains to the first dhyana.²⁸³ The Sutta's commentary says that this occurred during the ploughing festival of the Sakyas, when prince Siddhattha was still a boy. When the king found him sitting under the tree, he prostrated in veneration to his own child.²⁸⁴

9.10.3.5 Clearly, Gotama is a spiritually precocious child and person, who easily takes to meditation. He easily masters the formless dhyanas under the two teachers, Ālāra Kālāma and Rāma's son.²⁸⁵ Putting together all his meditative experience, he is able to find the middle way to full awakening. He goes through all the meditative stages before his awakening. It is very likely that he attaining his breakthrough into full awakening in the 4th dhyana, since it is the first of the dhyanas that is a state of “mental freedom” (*ceto, vimutti*) [9.10.23]. This is likely since buddhas are known to keep to their spiritual habits. Apparently, it is the nature of all buddhas to pass away upon emerging from the 4th dhyana.

9.10.4 (4) The Buddha's awakening

9.10.4.1 In **the Tapussa Sutta** (A 9.41), the Buddha tells us how he awakens after attaining the 4 dhyanas, the 4 formless attainments and cessation, followed by the destruction of his mental influxes. The cessation of perception and feeling is, in other words, an arhat's full experience of the bliss of nirvana, even here and now.²⁸⁶ Non-returners, too, can enjoy this bliss of cessation, but they still need to exhaust the remnants of their karma.

9.10.4.2 **The (Pañcāla, caṇḍa) Sambādha Sutta** (A 9.42), which immediately follows the Tapussa Sutta, too, describes how the Buddha's awakening comprises the 9 progressive abodes. Here, the Buddha describes each of the 4 dhyanas and the 4 formless attainments, but declares that every one of them still has some lingering “confinement” (*sambādha*), that is, they are all somehow connected with some subtle form of mental pleasure that is conditioned. As such, all these 8 dhyanas are “provisional or relative” (*pariyāyena*), that is, there is still some more spiritual cultivation needed before attaining full awakening. Cessation is that final state that is neither provisional nor relative, but is full and unconditional awakening, which is profoundly peaceful.²⁸⁷

9.10.5 (5) Cessation

9.10.5.1 The fifth reason for the Buddha's going through a cycle of meditation, and then passing away in the cessation of perception and feeling (*saññā, vediyita nirodha*), has to do with this last mentioned state itself. This anomalous state, simply known as “cessation” (*nirodha*), fully described in the **Visuddhi, magga**,²⁸⁸ is a combination of deep meditative calm and insight where all mental states temporarily shut down,²⁸⁹ “devoid of even subtle feeling and cognition, due to turning away from even the very refined peace of the fourth formless level” (Harvey 1993:10 digital ed).

²⁸² On the 9 progressive abodes, see (*Āsava-k, khaya*) **Jhāna S** (A 9.36/4:422-426), SD 33.8; also **Anupubbam, vihāra Ss 1+2** (A 9.32+33), SD 95.1 + 2.

²⁸³ M 36,31/1:246 @ SD 49.4.

²⁸⁴ MA 2:290; J 1:57 f. On this 1st dhyana's significance, see **Mahā Saccaka S** (M 36,31/1:246), SD 1.12; cf Chin version, T1428.781a-11. For other details, see Piya Tan, *The Buddha and His Disciples*, 2013:§1.12bc.

²⁸⁵ On his meditation with the 2 teachers, see SD 1.11 (4)..

²⁸⁶ A 9.41/4:448,7 @ SD 62.16.

²⁸⁷ A 9.42/4:451,20 + SD 33.2 (2).

²⁸⁸ Vism 23.16-52/702-709.

²⁸⁹ Vism 23.43/707 f.

Here the heart-beat and breathing stop (M 1:301 f), but a residual metabolism keeps the body alive for up to 7 days.²⁹⁰ Only an arhat or a non-returner can experience this cessation.²⁹¹ On emerging from cessation, they experience the fruit of their respective attainments (Vism 708). “It is thus one possible route to experiencing Nibbāna” (Harvey 1993:10 digital ed).

While a dead person has neither vitality nor heat, and their sense-organs are “broken up,” a person in cessation still has vitality and heat, and his sense-organs are “purified.”²⁹² According to Buddhaghosa, cessation is “the non-occurrence of the mind (*citta*) and mental states as a result of their progressive cessation.”²⁹³ Such a person is “without mind.”²⁹⁴

9.10.5.2 Even the subconscious (*bhavaṅga*), present in dreamless sleep, is absent in cessation. A person in cessation is effectively only body without any detectable mental states whatsoever. In modern terms, “deep hibernation” or “suspended animation” might give us a good idea of it [§3.33 n].²⁹⁵ Cessation, however, is far more complex than hibernation as we know it. The Sutta Commentary clearly states here, thus: “Then, they knew, ‘Now the Blessed One has attained cessation, and within cessation death does not occur’” (DA 2:594).

The Abhidhamma scholastics explain this by reference to the “life-continuum” (*bhav’āṅga*) or the subconscious, that is, a flow of mind-moments or consciousness operating at an organic level (Vism 23.42). The commentator **Dhamma, pāla** explains that the dying process needs the life-continuum: “There is no death within cessation, but on account of dying with the life-continuum after that.”²⁹⁶ In modern paraphrase, the Buddha does not die while in cessation, “since death is an organic process.”²⁹⁷ As such, the Buddha has to emerge from cessation in order to die, because there is no *bhav’āṅga* in cessation.²⁹⁸

9.10.5.3 Both **the Tapussa Sutta** (A 9.41) and **the (Pañcāla,caṇḍa) Sambādha Sutta** (A 9.42) [9.10.4]—both consecutive suttas in the Book of Nines of the Aṅguttara—makes the same point, that the Buddha’s awakens after he has progressed through the 4 dhyanas and the 4 formless attainments. He however understands them, as they are, as not capable of bringing awakening. It is through such seeing this that he goes on to attain cessation.

The Tapussa Sutta (A 9.41) relates that the 8 dhyanas that precede cessation are said to have each taken place “at a different time” (*aparena samayena*).²⁹⁹ In other words, the Sutta covers an extended time period, not just a single meditation session. That it takes some time for the Bodhisattva before being able to enter the dhyanas is also noted in **the (Anuruddha) Upakkilesa Sutta** (M 128) and its Madhyama Āgama parallel, which adopt the alternative mode of describing the dhyana that focuses on the role of “initial application” (*vitarka*) and “sustained application” (*vicāra*).³⁰⁰

The two parallels agree that before being able to master dhyana, the Bodhisattva has to overcome a series of mental obstructions one after the other.³⁰¹ The Chinese parallel explicitly states what is implicit in **the (Anuruddha) Upakkilesa Sutta** (M 128), namely, that the Bodhisattva’s dhyanas occur during consecutive days and nights.³⁰² The fact that the Buddha is known to have attained the 4 dhyanas on his awakening night,³⁰³ is clearly the result of his meditative prowess developed during his search for awakening.

²⁹⁰ Vism 23.42/707.

²⁹¹ A 5.166,3/3:192+31/3:194 @ SD 47.15; Vism 23.18/702, 23.49/708. On cessation of perception and feeling, see **Ariya Pariyesanā S** (M 26,42), SD 1.11 (4.1); **Sappurisa S** (M 113), SD 23.7 (2); **Animitta Ceto,samādhi Pañha S** (S 40.9/4:268 f), SD 24.19.

²⁹² M 1:296; D 2:334; Vism 23.51/709.

²⁹³ Vism 23.18/702.

²⁹⁴ Vism 23.43/707.

²⁹⁵ On the philosophical problems related to how the meditator emerges from cessation, see Griffiths 1986. On “the progressive cessation of formations” (*anupubba,saṅkhārānaṃ nirodha*), see S 36.11/4:217.

²⁹⁶ *Anto.nirodhe maraṇaṃ n’atthi carima,bhav’āṅgena mīyanato*. Dhammapāla, in Paramattha,mañjūsā (Visuddhi,magga Tīkā) 1678.25. See Rewatadhamma 1969-1972. Qu in P Griffiths, *On Being Mindless*, La Salle, IL, 1986:40 +n87.

²⁹⁷ Vism:Ñ 831 n17. An 2003:185 n3, D Keown 2010:11.

²⁹⁸ We might imagine that if the Buddha, or any arhat, were to remain in cessation, he could exist forever. However, this is impossible, as cessation can only last for 7 days at the most. By that time, such a person would have died anyway.

²⁹⁹ The modifying adv phrase, *aparena samayena*, is found in all the text main eds. Bodhi, however, notes an omission by Ce and Ee in the later sections in (A:B 1832 n1947).

³⁰⁰ On P *vitakka,vicāra*, see SD 8.4 (6.1+6.2).

³⁰¹ M 128,16/3:157,29 @ SD 5.18 & MĀ 72 @ T1.536c19.

³⁰² MĀ 72 @ T1.538c9.

³⁰³ See M 4/1:21,33 and its parallel in EĀ 31.1 @ T2.666b11; also at M 36/1:247,17 and its parallel in EĀ 31.8 @ T2.-671c27. The same report is also found in the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya (T1428 @ T22.781a23), and Mahāvastu 2:131. For other refs, see Analayo 2014:28 n96.

9.10.6 (6) The Buddha's re-discovery of the dhyanas

9.10.6.1 All this shows that the Buddha, at the moment of his full awakening, is adept in the 9 progressive abodes, experiencing the 4 dhyanas, the 4 formless attainments, and, finally, cessation. Some other meditators before the Buddha's time, had been able to attain these 8 dhyanas, too, but they did not properly comprehend their nature or significance.

The Brahma, jāla Sutta (D 1), for example, in its survey of the 62 bases for wrong views, show that those meditators of other sects who had attained the formless spheres had misconstrued them, and misled themselves and those who followed them into adopting annihilationism. On the other hand, those who had attained the 4 dhyanas had mistaken them to be nirvana here and now.³⁰⁴

9.10.6.2 **The Mahā Sakul'udāyī Sutta** (M 79), too, reports some practitioners in the Buddha's own time are dismayed to find out that the Buddha knows an attainment that goes beyond the third dhyana, which they consider to be the supreme goal.³⁰⁵ Notably, these practitioners are depicted as being ignorant of the way of practice that leads to what they considered as the highest goal. In other words, this Sutta apparently alludes to an ancient form of practice that led up to the third dhyana.³⁰⁶

However, by the Buddha's time, these sectarians are apparently only aware of the goal, but have forgotten the actual practice. The Cūḷa Sakul'udāyī Sutta records the Buddha as showing these sectarians how to reach the goal of their aspiration, and also declaring that there are attainments that surpass it.

9.10.6.3 The point is that, while some non-Buddhist meditators are able to attain the dhyanas and attainments, only the Buddha—and his accomplished followers—are able to attain cessation. This the Buddha discovers during his full awakening. What occurs during the Buddha's first nirvana (the nirvana with remains), the full awakening, also happens in his last nirvana (the nirvana without remains), the full passing away,³⁰⁷ that is, the Buddha going through the 9 progressive abodes.

9.10.7 How do we know all this?

9.10.7.1 A number of scholars have wondered how anyone could possibly have known what went on in the Buddha's mind. These scholars based their doubts on the notion that since the Buddha passes away right at the end of his meditation on the 9 progressive abodes, he would not have been able to tell others what actually has occurred in his mind.³⁰⁸

In those pioneer days (and to a significant extent, even today), scholars tend to be limited by the texts they are familiar with and remember, and by their own professionalism. However, if they are more circumspect, and are also practising Buddhists and meditators (as more scholars today tend to be), then such doubts and difficulties are less likely to arise. Otherwise, we have to bear with them, and patiently and gratefully work on their professional faults and quirks.

9.10.7.2 To be sure, **Analayo** agrees, it is not really possible for us to reconstruct historical facts based on mere textual accounts that are the final products of a longer period of transmission. This is especially true in the case of the Mahā, parinibbāna Sutta and its parallels, which are clearly interspersed with hagiographic elements.³⁰⁹ The point is that the early Buddhist suttas are not meant to be historical documents. They are careful

³⁰⁴ D 1/1:34,32, DĀ 21 @ T1.93b4. For other refs, see Analayo 2014:31 n107.

³⁰⁵ M 79/2:37,16 and MA 208 @ T1.786a24. See also the discussion in Analayo 2011:435 f.

³⁰⁶ This is, in fact, clearly stated in MA 3:275,2; also M:ÑB, which quotes Comy as saying that these practitioners “knew that in the past meditators would... attain the third jhana.” (M:ÑB 1287 n784).

³⁰⁷ On these 2 kinds of nirvana, see SD 45.18 (2.5).

³⁰⁸ T W Rhys Davids, eg, says, that “no one, of course, can have known what actually did occur.” (D:RD 2:174 n1). And A Bareau (1979: 62): “puisque, de toute évidence, le Bienheureux n'a pu expliquer à ses disciples par quelle méthode psychique, en ses derniers instants, il est parvenu au Parinirvāna, lui qui en était le seul témoin silencieux, il est donc certain que cette description est purement imaginaire” [“since, obviously, the Blessed One, having attained parinirvana, being his own only silent witness, could not, by any psychic means, explain to his disciples, this description is surely only imaginary] (1979:62).

³⁰⁹ Analayo 2014:15. A Roman Catholic scholar of Buddhism, Paul Williams (2000:26 f), eg, explains that “the life-story of the Buddha is not a historical narrative but a hagiography...in which how it was, how it should have been, and how it must have been...are united under the overriding concern of exemplary truth...the life-story reflects the unification of is and ought in the vision and needs of the subsequent community...the 'is' of historical fact was only one dimension, and a subordinate one, in the construction of the original hagiography. Thus the hagiography as a whole is to be read as an ideological document...the Buddha's hagiography should be read as an illustration of what is to Buddhists important.” Exactly the <http://dharmafarer.org>

and elaborate instructions in Buddhist training, presented to us in two basic ways, in figurative language (images, story etc)³¹⁰ and in Dharma language (a more direct reference to the teachings).³¹¹

What is missing or not always at once clear—the true meaning of the texts—can best, even only, be experienced through following their instructions to reach such a depth and breadth of meditation, so that we can link up the narratives and tease out their sense. Such an endeavour will inevitably transform us to taste some level of bliss and peace, so that we will aspire to walk the path in this life itself.

9.10.7.3 Nevertheless, reasures **Analayo**, it is possible to consider whether a particular narrative is internally coherent and in line with general ideas and notions found in other early Buddhist texts (2014:15 f). Analayo speaks from experience, as he specializes in “comparative Buddhism,” especially the correlations between the early Pali suttas and their parallels or related texts in the Sanskrit or in the translated canons of the Chinese, Tibetan, and other northern traditions.

According to early Buddhist teachings, such as **the Sāmañña,phala Sutta** (D 2), through deep meditation, we will be able to know or read another’s mind.³¹² Such a mind-reading ability is regularly mentioned among a set of supernormal mental abilities that has been cultivated to the level of the fourth dhyana.³¹³ In the case of Anuruddha, he specifically states in **the Ceto,pariya Sutta** (S 52.14), that it is the result of his mastery of the 4 satipatthanas.³¹⁴ There are also references to brahmas and to devas who read the Buddha’s mind.³¹⁵

It is in the light of such teachings and attainments that **the Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta** record the Buddha’s mental processes through the witnessing by the arhat Anuruddha.³¹⁶ After all, Anuruddha is declared by the Buddha to be the foremost of those monks with the supernormal ability, known the divine eye.³¹⁷ It is this ability, on account of his meditative powers, he is able to read the Buddha’s mind, and inform Ānanda that the Buddha is going through the various stages of the 9 progressive abodes and finally passes away.³¹⁸

10 Tools for preserving the teaching

10.1 CONDITIONS FOR NON-DECLINE. R M L Gethin has discussed quite instructively on the six sets of teachings (both the *aparahaṇīya, dhammā* and the *bodhi, pakkhīya, dhammā*) and the 4 great references in his *The Buddhist Path to Awakening* (2001:230-240).³¹⁹ The seven sets (*bodhi, pakkhīya, dhammā*) are also discussed by A K Warder in his *Indian Buddhism* (1970:81-106 = ch 4).

The teachings of the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta opens with six lists: the first on a nation’s welfare [§§1.1.4-5] and the other five on the preservation and growth of the teaching, that is, the “conditions for non-decline of the Sangha” (*aparahaṇīya, dhammā*) [§§1.6-11]. The first five sets of *aparahaṇīyā dhammā* (of which the awakening-factors, *bojjhaṅgā*, are the fourth) have 7 points each, and finally a set of 6 [§1.11]. The Mūla, sarvāstivādin Mahā Parinirvāṇa Sūtra gives 6 sets of *aparahaṇīyā dharmāḥ* (of which the awakening-factors, *bodhy-aṅgā*, are

same can be said of the founding figures and luminaries of other religions, especially Mahāyāna Buddhism and Christianity.

³¹⁰ See **Myth in Buddhism**, SD 36.1.

³¹¹ On the nature of the early suttas, see **Language and discourse**, SD 26.11.

³¹² Called *ceto,pariya,ñāṇa* in **Sāmañña,phala S** (D 2,93), SD 8.10; *para.citta,vijānanā* in **Ceti,pariya S** (S 52.14) [below]; or “the miracle of mind-reading (*ādesana, pāṭihāriya*) in **Kevaḍḍha S** (D 11,6), SD 1.7.

³¹³ D 2/1:79,26 and its parallels DĀ 27 @ T1.109b8 (which is abridged and so needs to be supplemented from DĀ 20 @ T1.86a23), T22 @ T1.275b26, and Saṅgha,bheda,vastu (Gnoli 1978:248,16).

³¹⁴ S 52.14/5:304.

³¹⁵ Usually it is Brahmā Sahampati who reads the Buddha’s mind: **Cātumā S** (M 67,8/1:458), SD 34.7; **Gāraṇa S** (S 6.2,9/1:139), SD 12.3.

³¹⁶ In reply to Rhys Davids’ comment [9.10.7.1 n], Walshe says that “since Anuruddha is said to have had highly developed psychic powers, we cannot be so sure” (D:W 575 n454). Nyanaponika & Hecker explain the Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta account of Anuruddha reading the Buddha’s mind, note that “Anuruddha, an arahant endowed with the divine eye, had been able to gauge the level of meditation into which the Buddha had entered.” (1997:208)

³¹⁷ A 1.14/1:23,20; EĀ 4.2 @ T2.557b9. See also **Dibba,cakkhu S** (S 52.23). The “divine eye” (*dibba,cakkhu*) is actually the ability to see how beings fare (arise, live and pass away) according to their karma. The power of mind-reading is categorized as one of the multiple psychic powers (*iddhi,vidha*) or as one of the powers of a fully accomplished arhat with the 6 superknowledges, ie, those of multifarious psychic powers, of the divine ear (clairaudience), mind-reading, recollection of one’s own past lives, of how beings fare according to their karma, and of the destruction of the influxes of sense-desire, existence, views and ignorance. See SD 27.5a (5), esp (5.3): Mind-reading.

³¹⁸ (**Saṃyutta**) **Parinibbāna S** (S 6.15) can also be understood in the same light, although this Sutta does not record any exchange between Anuruddha and Ānanda. Nevertheless, the fact that S 6.15/1:159,1 gives stanzas spoken by Anuruddha, shows that he is present at the Buddha’s passing, so that, with his psychic ability, he can read the Buddha’s mind.

³¹⁹ See also Warder 1980:81.

the sixth), and finally a set of 6 (Waldschmidt, *Mahā Parinirvāṇa Sūtra*, 1950-51:128). Bareau discusses the different lists of *aparīhāṇīyā dharmāḥ* in the various extant versions of the Sūtra (*Recherches* 1963-71, 2:32-39): 7 of the 8 versions include the *bodhy-aṅgā*.³²⁰

Understandably, with the Buddha's impending parinirvana, the main concern here is the future of the teaching and the sangha. The importance of these passages are reflected in the fact that they are found "to afford a considerable amount of parallel material in Buddhist Sanskrit sources and in Chinese and Tibetan translations" (Gethin 2001:229).

10.2 THE 37 LIMBS OF AWAKENING. At the hall of the gabled house (*kūṭ'āgāra, sālā*) [§3.50], the Buddha gives another teaching list of **seven items** (sets comprising the 37 limbs of awakening).³²¹ The Pali Sutta and its Sanskrit versions as well as its Chinese and Tibetan translations³²² "apparently include a version of the present incident, namely a summary of the Buddha's teaching based on the seven sets and given by the Buddha in the context of the announcement of his imminent *parinirvāṇa*" (Gethin 2001:231). Gethin goes on to set out the Mūlasarvāstivādin version to show both a basic correspondence with the Pali version as well as interesting variations in details:

Then the Blessed One went to the meeting hall. Having reached there, he sat down on the prepared seat before the order of monks. Seated thus, the Blessed One addressed the monks:

"Impermanent are all formations [conditions], bhikshus, they are unstable, uncertain, their nature is to change. To that extent, bhikshus, enough with the forming of all formations, one should let go (of them). Therefore, bhikshus, those dharmas which conduce to good and happiness here and now, to good and happiness in the future—having grasped and mastered them, monks should thus preserve them, give instruction in them, teach them, so that the holy life might endure long; this will be for the good of the many, for the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the benefit, good and happiness of devas and humans. And what are those dharmas...?"

Just these, *the four establishments of mindfulness, the four right efforts [abandonings?], the four bases of success, the 5 faculties, the 5 powers, the seven factors of awakening, the noble eightfold path.*"³²³

Gethin notes that the opening formula of this Mūlasarvāstivādin version "seems to parallel in spirit what comes at the close of the Pāli passage" (2001:232).³²⁴ The above Mūlasarvāstivādin excerpt is also found in another context, namely, that of the Buddha's first illness and his remarking about the closed first of the teacher [§§2.23-25]. Gethin mentions that the lacuna in the Sanskrit manuscript here and quotes Snellgrove's translation from the Tibetan to fill this gap:

Ānanda, I do not have the idea that the order of monks is mine, that I must cleave to the order and lead it, so how should I have a last exhortation, even a slight one, with which to instruct the order? Whatever teachings I have had which were relevant to the order of monks, I have already taught them as the principles which must be practised, namely, [**the four establishments of mindfulness, the four right efforts, the four bases of success, the five faculties, the five powers, the seven factors of awakening,**

³²⁰ See Gethin 2001:146 f.

³²¹ *Bodhi, pakkhīya dhamma*: for their detailed studies, see SD 10.

³²² André Bareau [5 above] has given a detailed analysis of the various Parinirvana traditions.

³²³ *Mahā Parinirvāṇa Sūtra* (ed Waldschmidt) 222-224: *atha bhagavān yenopasthāna-sālā tenopasamkrāntaḥ. upasamkramya purastād bhikṣu-saṅghasya prajñāpta ev'āsane nyasīdat. niṣadya bhagavān bhikṣūn āmantrayate sma. anityā bhikṣavaḥ sarva-saṃskārā adhruvā anāśvāsikā vipariṇāma-dharmaṇo yāvad alam eva bhikṣavaḥ sarva-saṃskārān saṃskārituṃ alam virantum. tasmāt tarhi bhikṣavo ye te dharmā dṛṣṭa-dharma-hitāya saṃvartante dṛṣṭa-dharma-sukhāya samparāya-hitāya samparāya-sukhāya te bhikṣubhir udgrhya paryavāpya tathā tathā dhārayitavyā grāhayitavyā vācayitavyā yathēdaṃ brahmacaryāṃ cira-sthitikāṃ syāt tad bhaviṣyati bahu-jana-hitāya bahu-jana-sukhāya lokānukampārthāya hitāya sukhāya deva-manuṣyānām. katame te dharmā dṛṣṭa-dharma-hitāya saṃvartante...tadyathā catvāri smṛty-upasthānāni catvāri samyak prahāṇāni catvāri ṛddhi-pādāḥ pañcendriyāni pañca bālāni sapta bodhy-aṅgāny āryāṣṭāṅgo mārgaḥ.* Cf Divy 207 f.

³²⁴ He also notes that two other sections of this excerpt are found to parallel two passages in other parts of the Pali Canon. He notes that this is rare. (Gethin 2002:232)

the noble eightfold path]. As Buddha I do not have the closed-fistedness of a teacher who thinks he must conceal things as unsuitable to others. (Snellgrove, BSOAS 36, 1973:401)

The 37 limbs of awakening (*bodhi, pakkhiya.dhamma*) in the form of a set of 7 teachings as tools in the preservation of the teaching are found in a number of suttas, such as **the Sampasādanīya Sutta** (D 28/3:99-116), **the Pāsādika Sutta** (D 29/3:117-141), **the Kin'ti Sutta** (M 103/2:238-243), and **the Sāma,gāma Sutta** (M 104/2:243-251).³²⁵ Rupert Gethin's *The Buddhist Path to Awakening* (2001) is a monograph on the 37 limbs of awakening, which he discusses by way of these "7 sets" of teachings.

10.3 THE 7 SETS

10.3.1 The oldest set of the "great references" (*mahā'padesā*) serving as quality control in the transmission of the Dharma is evidently that found in **the Pāsādika Sutta** (D 3:128) of the Dīgha Nikāya. The Sutta opens immediately after the death of "Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta," when quarrels and disagreement split the Jain community. In this connection, the Buddha exhorts Cunda Samaṇ'uddesa³²⁶ thus:

If anyone, Cunda, speaking rightly, were to speak of a well spoken, fully accomplished holy life that has been well proclaimed, accomplished in every way, with nothing less, with nothing more, speaking rightly, he would speak of this very well spoken, fully accomplished holy life that has been well proclaimed, accomplished in every way, with nothing less, with nothing more.

Therefore, Cunda, all of you to whom I have taught these truths that I have directly known should gather together and recite them, comparing meaning with meaning, comparing text with text [comparing spirit with spirit, letter with letter], without dissension [without quarrelling],

so that this holy life might endure, stand long,

and this for for the good of the many, for the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world, and for the benefit, profit and happiness of devas and humans.

And what, Cunda, are these teachings, directly understood by me, that I have shown you, that, all, having gathered and assembled, should not quarrel, but rehearse [recite] meaning for meaning, word for word?

They are (the 37 limbs of awakening) namely (the seven sets):³²⁷

the 4 focuses of mindfulness,	<i>cattāro satipaṭṭhāna</i> ³²⁸	
the 4 right efforts,	<i>samma-p, padhāna</i> ³²⁹	
the 4 paths to spiritual power,	<i>iddhi, pādā</i> ³³⁰	
the 5 spiritual faculties,	<i>pañc 'indriya</i> . ³³¹	
the 5 spiritual powers,	<i>pañca, bala</i> ³³²	
the 7 awakening-factors,	<i>satta bojjaṅga</i> . ³³³	
the noble eightfold path.	<i>ariyo atṭh 'aṅgiko magga</i> ³³⁴	(D 29,16+17/3:127 f)

10.3.2 The emphasis here is on avoiding dispute and reaching clear agreement: the monks should not quarrel, and should not allow the teaching to be distorted.³³⁵ Paralleling the 4 great references, the procedure laid out by **the Pāsādika Sutta** is as follows:

³³⁶And, Cunda, when you are gathered together harmoniously,

³²⁵ See §10d below & Gethin 2001:232-240 for a useful discussion.

³²⁶ The younger brother of Sāriputta.

³²⁷ These 7 sets are listed in **Mahā,parinibbāna S** (D 19,3.50b/2:120 + SD 9 (10c)) given in full in **Sakul'udāyī S** (M 77,15-21/2:11 f @ SD 6.18) and as practised by various monks, in **Ānāpāna,sati S** (M 118,13/3:81 @ SD 7.13).

³²⁸ See D 1:56, 339, 2:83, 290-315, 3:101; S 3:96, 153; A 2:218, 3:12.

³²⁹ See V 1:22; D 2:120; M 3:296, 2:96; A 2:74, 15 f.

³³⁰ See D 2:213, 221; M 1:103 = 2:11; A 1:39, 297, 2:256, 3:82; Vbh 213.

³³¹ See M 1:295; S 3:46, 225, 4:168; A 2:151. See foll n.

³³² See D 2:120, 239; M 2:12, 3:296; S 3:96, 153, 4:366; A 3:10, 12; Vbh 342.

³³³ See D 2:79, 83, 120, 302, 3:101, 128, 251, 282; M 1:11, 2:12; S 1:54, 5:83; A 1:14, 4:23; Vbh 277.

³³⁴ See D 1:256 f, 165, 312; M 1:61, 118, 3:251; It 18; Sn 1130; Vbh 235.

³³⁵ See Gethin, *The Buddhist Path to Awakening*, 2001:232 f.

³³⁶ *Tesaṇ ca vo cunda samaggānaṃ sammodamānānaṃ avivadamānānaṃ sikkhitabbaṃ, aññataro sabrahmacārī saṅghe dhammaṃ bhāseyya. Tatra ce tumhākaṃ evaṃ assa—(1) atthañ c'eva micchā gaṇhāti, vyañjanāni ca micchā ropetī ti...; (2) atthaṃ hi kho micchā gaṇhāti, vyañjanāni sammā ropetī ti...; (3) atthaṃ hi kho sammā gaṇhāti, vyañjanāni micchā ropetī ti—tassa n'eva abhinandītabbaṃ na paṭikkosītabbaṃ. Anabhinandītvā appaṭikkosītvā so evaṃ assa vacanīyo; (4) atthañ ñ'eva sammā gaṇhāti, vyañjanāni sammā ropetī ti.*

you should train yourselves thus when a certain fellow in the holy life speaks the Dharma before the sangha.

Now, suppose he were to speak thus:

1. “You have grasped *both* the meaning and the wording of this *wrongly*,” or
2. “You have grasped the meaning *wrongly* but the wording *rightly*,” or
3. “You have grasped the meaning *rightly* but the wording *wrongly*.”

Neither approving nor disapproving, you should, with careful attention, make him comprehend *only the disagreed points*.

Now, suppose he were to speak thus:

4. “You have grasped *both* the meaning and the wording *rightly*,”

then you should applaud him, saying,

“Sadhu! [Excellent!]...This is a great advantage to us all that you are so accomplished in its meaning and its wording!”
(D 29,18-21/3:129; abridged & paraphrased)

10.3.3 The Sāmagāma Sutta (M 104/2:243-251) appears in some way to be the Majjhima Nikāya version of the Pāsādika Sutta of the Dīgha Nikāya. Both Suttas open with mentioning the Buddha dwelling among the Sakyas, immediately after the death of “Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta,” when quarrels and disagreement split the Jain community. In both Suttas, both Cunda and Ānanda mention the incident to the Buddha. In the Sāmagāma Sutta, however, Ānanda concludes with a more specific point, and the Buddha responds:

“This occurs to me, bhante: Let not a dispute arise in the Sangha after the passing away of the Blessed One. Such a dispute would be to the detriment of the many, the unhappiness of the many, the loss, detriment and suffering of devas and humans.”

“What do you think, Ānanda? Those things that I have directly known and taught you, namely, the 4 focuses of mindfulness...the noble eightfold path—Ānanda, do you see any two monks who have differing opinions regarding them?”
(M 104,4/2:245)

Ānanda replies no but suggests that after the Buddha’s passing those who live taking him as their refuge might become involved in dispute “in connection with livelihood” (*ajjh’ājīva*) and “in connection with the code of discipline” (*adhipātimokkha*),³³⁷ and that this will be to the disadvantage of the many. The Buddha, however, replies:

“Ānanda, a dispute about livelihood or about the Pātimokkha would be trifling. But, Ānanda, should there arise in the Sangha a dispute about the path or the way, such a dispute would be to the detriment of the many, the unhappiness of the many, the loss, detriment and suffering of devas and humans!”
(M 104,5/2:245)

10.3.4 Similarly, **the Kin’ti Sutta** (M 103/2:238-243), focussing on the centrality of the seven sets forming the 37 limbs of awakening, teaches ways of overcoming any disagreement regarding the spirit and the letter of the Dharma. The Sutta opens with the Buddha declaring:

Bhikshus, what do you think of me? That the recluse Gotama teaches Dharma for the sake of robes? Or, that the recluse Gotama teaches Dharma for the sake of almsfood? Or, that the recluse Gotama teaches Dharma for the sake of lodgings? Or, that the recluse Gotama teaches Dharma for the sake of this or that existence [different states of being]?
(M 103,2/2:238)

The monks reply that the Buddha “is compassionate, one seeks after our good; he teaches the Dharma out of compassion.”

“Therefore, monks, those things that I have directly known and taught you, namely, the four focuses of mindfulness...the noble eightfold path—in these things you should all train yourself in concord, with mutual appreciation, without disputing.

³³⁷ *Ajjh’ājīva* and *adhipātimokkha*, see CPD which qu MA 4:38.
<http://dharmafarer.org>

While you are training yourself in concord, with mutual appreciation, without disputing, let not any two monks differ in opinions regarding the Dharma (*abhidhamme*).” (M 103,3-4/2:239)

The Buddha then shows how to deal with possible areas of discord: where there is disagreement about the meaning (*attha*) and the wording (*vyañjana*), that is, both together and each separately; where a monk commits some offence (*āpatti*) or transgression (*vītikāma*); where argument and ill feeling exist between groups (M 103,5-7/2:239-243).

10.3.5 As the 37 “actors leading to awakening,” the seven sets constitute the “path cultivation” (*magga,-bhāvanā*) (V 3:93, 4:126), a fact also reflected in **the Abhidharma,kośa Bhāṣya** (AbhkB tr Pruden 1988: 1022 f). It is clear, therefore, as Gethin wisely observes (referring to “the Dharma Mirror”),³³⁸ that the appeal to the seven sets of teachings,

is not an appeal to *dharmas* as “teachings” or “doctrines”—at least not in the limited sense of a body of teachings or doctrines that can exist apart from the actual path and way. The nature of the appeal to the seven sets is a matter of appeal to practice and experience rather than an appeal to theory and scripture. The appeal ultimately rests on the fact that the seven sets embrace *dharmas* that the *bhikkhu* [or practitioner] can gain personal direct knowledge of, they constitute *dhamma* that is “to be known by the wise each one for himself” (*paccattam veditabbo viññūhi*). (Gethin 2001:236)

Gethin follows with an instructive discussion on the 7 sets which should be fully read (2001:236-263).

10.3.6 This important list of dharmas forms the matrix (*māṭikā/māṭṛkā*), defined thus in the *Dictionary of Buddhism*:

a rubric or tabulated summary of contents used in the philosophical sections of the books of the Abhidharma Piṭaka. Originally a Vinaya term, used in the singular (Pāli, *māṭikā*), it meant a keyword. Used in the plural (also *māṭikā*), it means the keywords for a topic, and hence a list.

In other words, they are the living essence of the Buddha’s teaching. The Abhidharma,kośa Bhāṣya refers these dharmas as that aspect of the true teaching (*saddharma*) pertaining to realization (*adhigama*). The teachings of the Sūtra, the Vinaya and the Abhidharma, on the other hand are the “traditions” (*āgama*) (AbhkB:P 1281).³³⁹ It is through the 37 limbs of awakening that the holy life (*brahma,cariya*) is able to endure and stand long (*addhaniya cira-ṭ,ṭhitika*, D 3:27).

Summary of the suttas in connection with the 7 sets*

Pāsādika Sutta: “You should gather together and recite them [the 7 sets], comparing meaning with meaning, comparing text with text [comparing spirit with spirit, letter with letter], without dissension [without quarrelling]” (D 29.18/3:128).

Sāmagāma Sutta: “A dispute about livelihood or about the Pātimokkha would be trifling. But, Ānanda, should there arise in the Sangha a dispute about the path or the way, such a dispute would be to the detriment of the many...” (M 104.5/2:245)

Kin’ti Sutta: “You should all train yourself in concord, with mutual appreciation, without disputing... let not any two monks differ in opinions regarding the Dharma” (M 103.4/2:239)

Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta: “You should learn them well, associate with them, cultivate them, develop them” [§3.50].

*The first three suttas here are the oldest references to the method of authentication of the Buddha’s teaching; the second stage in this development is found in the **Peṭakōpadesa** and the **Nettipakarāṇa**; the third stage is found in the **Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta** [§§4.7-11] and the **Commentaries**.

10.4 The 3 trainings

10.4.1 The Sutta Piṭaka (Basket of Discourses) opens with 13 suttas (forming the *Sīla-k,khandha Vagga*),³⁴⁰ dealing with the fruits of recluseship (*sāmañña,phala*) (D 1:1-253).³⁴¹ Technically, the “fruits” of recluseship are

³³⁸ D 16,2.9/ 2:93; also Nm 1:132.

³³⁹ See Gethin 2001:56 f & K Dhammajoti, *Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma*, Kelaniya, 2002:7 f.

³⁴⁰ “The chapter on the groups of moral virtue,” comprising vol 1 of the Pali Text Society’s ed of *Dīgha*.

fourfold: streamwinning, once-return, non-return and arhathood.³⁴² Often, however, the *stages* of the fruits of recluseship are laid out, as in **the Sāmañña,phala Sutta** (D 2). The elaborate stages of the fruits of recluseship generally follow a well-defined order: the preliminary stages of the path cultivate “moral virtue” (*sīla*), the middle stages “mental concentration” (*samādhi*), and the final stages “wisdom” (*paññā*).³⁴³

10.4.2 One of the most important expressions of the progressive development of the fruits of recluseship is the formula of progressive talk (*ānupubbī,kathā*), here given in full:

Then the Blessed One gave him a progressive talk—that is to say, he spoke on giving (*dāna*), on moral virtue (*sīla*) and on the heavens (*sagga*). He explained the danger, the vanity and the disadvantages of sensual pleasures (*kām’ādīnava*), and the advantages of renunciation (*nekkhamm’ānisaṃsa*). When the Blessed One perceived that the listener’s mind was prepared, pliant, free from obstacles, elevated and lucid, then he explained to him the teaching peculiar to the Buddhas (*buddhānaṃ sāmuk-kamsikā desanā*), that is to say, suffering (*dukkha*), its arising, its cessation, and the path.

(V 1:15; D 1:148; A 3:184 etc)

The stages of the fruits of recluseship also constitute the 3 trainings (*ti sikkhā*)³⁴⁴—as moral virtue (*sīla*), mental concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*)—which are given in stock and recur nine times throughout **the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta**:

This is moral virtue, this is concentration, this is wisdom. Concentration, when well cultivated³⁴⁵ with moral virtue, brings great fruit and great profit. Wisdom, when well cultivated with concentration, brings great fruit and great profit. The mind, when well cultivated with wisdom, becomes completely free from the mental influxes,³⁴⁶ that is to say, from the influx of sensual lust, the influx of existence, the influx of false views and the influx of ignorance. (D 16,1.12, 1.14, 1.18, 2.4, 2.10, 2.20, 4.4, 4.12)³⁴⁷

10.4.3 We have a basic hierarchy of spiritual progress in terms of moral development, mental development and spiritual wisdom.³⁴⁸ Understandably, if one tries to develop wisdom (*paññā*), one first needs some measure of mental concentration (*samādhi*). If one tries to cultivate concentration, clearly one needs some measure of moral virtue.

³⁴¹ This usage of the term is found at D 1:51 f; Vism 215; VvA 71; VbhA 317. The **Majjhima** appears to use a slightly abbreviated form of the *sīla-k,khandha vagga* material (M 1:178-184, 267-271, 3:33-36, 134-147. See Gethin 2001:208 for details.

³⁴² D 3:227, 277; S 5:25; Dhs 1016; DhsA 423; Miln 344, 358; three mentioned at Kvu 112.

³⁴³ D 2:1:47-86 @ SD 8.10. Gethin’s n: “In **the silakkhandha-vagga** the terminology in fact varies. The *Sāmaññaphala-sutta*, while giving the account in full, does not explicitly divide it into three categories. This is true also of the *Kūṭadanta-*, *Mahāli-*, *Jāliya-*, *Kevaddha-* and *Lohicca-suttas*. (The *Poṭṭhapāda-* and *Tevijja-suttas* depart from the standard pattern after the account of the fourth *jhāna*, inserting descriptions of the four formless attainments and four *brahma-vihāras* respectively.) In the *Ambaṭṭha-sutta* the categories are just two, *carāṇa* and *vijjā*; in the *Soṇadaṇḍa-sutta* just as *sīla* and *paññā*; in the *Kassapasīhanāda-sutta* they are *sīla-sampadā* and *paññā-sampadā*; in the *Subha-sutta* they are called *sīla-kkhandha*, *samādhi-kkhandha* and *paññā-kkhandha*” (2001:207 n79).

³⁴⁴ D 1:207, 3:220; A 1:229.

³⁴⁵ “Well cultivated,” *paribhāvito*. In a stock simile, eggs are said to be *paribhāvītāni* (M 1:104; S 3:153) by a brooding hen. According to Rhys Davids, in medicine, the word means “charged with, impregnated with.” See J 1:380, 4:407; cf Miln 361, 382, 394; cf Bhagavad Gītā 3.38 for this simile.

³⁴⁶ “**Mental influxes**,” *āsava*, lit “inflow, outflow,” which comes from *ā-savati* “flows towards” (ie either “into” or “out” towards the observer). It has been variously translated as taints (“deadly taints,” RD), corruptions, intoxicants, biases, depravity, misery, bad (influence), or simply left untranslated. The Abhidhamma lists 4 *āsavas*: the influxes of (1) sense-desire (*kām’āsava*), (2) (desire for eternal) existence (*bhav’āsava*), (3) wrong views (*diṭṭh’āsava*), (4) ignorance (*avijjāsava*) (D 16,1.12/2:82, 16.2.4/2:91, Pm 1.442, 561, Dhs §§1096-1100, Vbh §937). These four are also known as “floods” (*ogha*) and “yokes” (*yoga*). The list of three influxes (omitting the influx of views) [§43] is probably older and is found more frequently in the suttas (D 3:216, 33.1.10(20); M 1:55, 3:41; A 3.59, 67, 6.63). The destruction of these *āsavas* is equivalent to arhathood. See BDict: āsava.

³⁴⁷ **The 3 trainings**, see §16.1 n in the sutta.

³⁴⁸ See eg **Subha S** (M 99/2:196-209) and **Kassapa Sīhanāda S = Mahā Sīhanāda S** (D 8).

What this means in practice is that it is understood that someone can have developed *sīla* but need not necessarily have developed *samādhi* and *paññā*; someone can have developed *sīla* and *samādhi*, but not necessarily have developed *paññā* to any great degree. However, the converse cannot be so. This is reflected in the corresponding hierarchy of religious goals. The development of *sīla* alone leads to a happy rebirth in the *kāma-loka*; the development of *sīla* and *samādhi* to rebirth in the *brahma-loka*; by developing *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā* rebirth in all kinds is transcended. (Gethin 2001:209)

10.4.4 Gethin goes on to quote this important passage from **the Vimutti,magga**:

After acknowledging the Path of Freedom, through virtue he transcends the way to the states of regress (*apāya*); through concentration, he transcends the sense plane, through wisdom he transcends all becoming [existence]. If he practises virtue to the full and practises little of concentration and wisdom, he will reach the state of Stream-entrant and stage of Once-returned. If he practises virtue and concentration to the full [but] practises little of wisdom, he will reach the stage of Non-returned. If he practises virtue, concentration and wisdom to the full, he will reach the peerless freedom of the Consummate One.

(Vimm:ESK 5; cf A 4:380 f)

By the end of the Nikāya period (when the compilation of the four Nikāyas and the Sutta,nipāta were more or less fixed), if not earlier, this threefold system has been applied to the three stages of the noble path.³⁴⁹ LS Cousins, in his article, “Samatha-yāna and Vipassanā-yāna” (1984), adds this helpful explanation related to the above remark:

This might be better expressed by saying that all *ariya* disciples have mastered the precepts; the never-returned has mastered both *sīla* and *samādhi*; while the arahat has mastered wisdom as well. This corresponds quite closely to the structure of the Buddhist cosmos. One is reborn as a deva through generosity and keeping the precepts, as a brahma through developing *samādhi* and in the Pure Abodes by developing wisdom. Quite logically all brahmas are also devas but not vice versa, while all those resident in the Pure Abodes are both devas and brahmas.

This may be termed the *vertical structure* of the path. An alternative view becomes very important in the Abhidhamma. The whole of the path is seen as arising together in unity at the moment of attainment. This we will call the *horizontal structure*. It is applied, for example, to the *bodhi-pakkhiya-dhammas* in relation to each of the four paths (*magga*). On a lesser level it is applied to the five faculties (*indriya*) in relation to *jhāna*. (L S Cousins, 1984:57)

10.4.5 While the sliding hierarchy of the 3 trainings forms a neat theory, the reality of practice is rather subtle.³⁵⁰ In fact, moral virtue, concentration and wisdom are inextricably bound together. This means that the spiritual beginner should not only establish himself in moral virtue, but should also at least cultivate some level of concentration and wisdom, and the adept at the advanced stages of the path, accomplished in wisdom, nevertheless needs moral virtue and concentration. This is clearly reflected in Soṇadaṇḍa’s words to the Buddha who approves of them:³⁵¹

Just as, Gotama, one might wash hand with hand or foot with foot; even so, wisdom is fully cleansed by moral virtue, moral virtue is fully cleansed by wisdom. Where there is moral virtue, there is wisdom; where there is wisdom, there is moral virtue. The morally virtuous has wisdom; the wise has moral virtue. Moral virtue and wisdom are declared the summit of the world. (D 4,21/1:124)

10.4.6 In terms of actual practice, the noble eightfold path formula is always given as *sīla-samādhi-paññā*, as stated in **the Cūḷa Vedalla Sutta** (M 44), where the nun Dhammādinna explains to the layman Visākha, thus:

The three aggregates³⁵² [the 3 trainings] are not included by the noble eightfold path, avuso Visākha, but the noble eightfold path is included by the three aggregates. Right speech, right action, and right livelihood: these states are included in the aggregate of moral virtue. Right effort, right mindfulness and right

³⁴⁹ A 1:231-235, 4:380 f; Pug 37; cf A 2:136.

³⁵⁰ A number of scholars have pointed this out: H Saddhātissa, *Buddhist Ethics*, London, 1970:68; R Gombrich, “Notes on the brahminical background to Buddhist ethics” in G Dhammapala, *Buddhist Studies in honour of Hammalava Saddhatissa*, 1984:91-102; and R Gethin, *The Buddhist Path to Awakening*, 2001:209-212.

³⁵¹ In **Soṇa,daṇḍa S** (D 4), the stages of the path are considered only as *sīla* and *paññā*. Implicit here is that these two in themselves conduce to the cultivation of moral virtue.

³⁵² Here, “aggregates” (*khandha*) is simply collective term, referring to the components of each state of the 3 trainings.

concentration: these states are included in the aggregate of concentration. Right view and right thought: these states are included in the aggregate of wisdom. (M 44,11/1:301)

10.4.7 In the traditional arrangement of the noble eightfold path, we have the sequence, *paññā-sīla-samā-dhi*. The very first of the 8 path-factors is right view (*sammā,diṭṭhi*), whose primacy on the spiritual path is clearly explained in **the Mahā Cattārīsaka Sutta** (M 117). If life is a journey, then the pilgrim’s goal is the city of nirvana. The path leading to nirvana is the noble eightfold path (*ariya’atṭhaṅgika magga*). The guide on this noble path is right view, and as long as he is ahead of others, the pilgrim is on the right track.

Conversely, one is easily lost when one is (mis)guided by wrong view. The recurring theme of this sutta is the primacy of right view with regard to “noble right concentration along with its support and equipment” (*ariyam...sammā,samādhim...sa,upanisam sa,parikkharani*) [§§2, 3] and that “in this regard, bhikshus, right view comes first” (*tatra sammā,diṭṭhi pubbañ,gamā*) [§§4, 10, 16, 22, 28, 34 f] (M 117/3:71-78). In other words, the noble eightfold path deals with the 3 trainings in a different way.

While [the noble eightfold path] does not by way of content fully embrace the aggregates of *sīla*, *samādhī* and *paññā*, its eight factors do collectively touch on and comprise each of these three aspects—uniquely among the seven sets. Thus the eight factors collectively represent, as it were, an actual manifestation of all three aspects, so that the *ariyo atṭhaṅgiko maggo* can be seen as the essential distillation of the aggregates of *sīla*, *samādhī* and *paññā*. The *ariyo atṭhaṅgiko maggo* comprises the whole of the spiritual life precisely in the sense that it is the consummation of the development of *sīla*, *samādhī* and *paññā*. It is the path or way of life that issues from that development. In other words, the development of *sīla*, *samādhī* and *paññā* in all its various aspects culminates in right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right striving, right mindfulness, right concentration—*paññā*, *sīla*, and *samādhī*, the three essential aspects of spiritual practice in perfect balance. It is only in this manner that the treatment of the *ariyo atṭhaṅgiko maggo* in the *Cūḷavedalla-sutta* becomes properly intelligible. (Gethin 2001:212)

The noble eightfold path, therefore, does not comprise successful stages like a three-rung ladder nor even milestones or signboards along the way. They constitute a path, not in a linear progression from start to finish; rather, “they embody a complete ‘way of going along’ or ‘mode of practice’—a *paṭipadā*. The 8 factors embrace all that is essential to spiritual progress” (Gethin 2001:212).

10.4.8 In the **Ānāpāna,sati Sutta** (M 118), the Buddha declares that there various groups of monks each engaged in the cultivation of one of the seven sets (M 118,13/3:81). This clearly shows that the sets are all tools for gaining the same goal. In fact, the Nikāyas seem to suggest that by developing just one of the 37 methods (comprising the 7 sets) to completion, one reaches the end of the path of awakening. Yet

[t]he bringing to fulfillment of any one of the seven sets cannot be accomplished without bringing to fulfillment all seven sets. For, as the *Nettipakaraṇa* puts it, all *dhammas* that lead to awakening and contribute to awakening have but one characteristic, the characteristic of “leading out” [*niyyānika*]. In other words, there exists between the thirty-seven *dhammas* a relationship of reciprocity and radical interdependence. (Gethin 2001:352)

11 The 4 great references

11.1 DEFINITIONS OF MAHĀ’PADESA

11.1.2 Buddhaghosa explains *mahā’padesā* as “great occasions” (*mahā okāse*) or as “great references” or “great criteria” (*mahā apadese*) (DA 2:565).³⁵³ The former emphasizes the reception of teaching while the latter the sources. In other words, these are the 4 “normative” means³⁵⁴ by which one may receive any transmission of the Dharma and Vinaya. Buddhaghosa goes on to explain “the word and syllables” (*pada,vyañjanāni*) as “sounds which are reckoned as words” (DA 2:565). **Dhammapāla**, however, contra Buddhaghosa, analyses the term as *attha,pada* (word meaning) and *vyañjana,pada* (word phrase) (DAṬ 2:212), that is, the spirit and the letter. “Buddhaghosa’s understanding leads to defining *otāretabb[ā]ni* as ‘to be collated,’ whereas Dhamma-

³⁵³ For a discussion on Buddhaghosa’s “understanding of *mahā’padesa*,” see An Yang-Gyu 2002b:61-64.

³⁵⁴ Ronald M Davidson 1990:300.

pāla's definition results in what we can translate as 'to be entered into (the 4 noble truths)' (An Yang-Gyu 2002b:57).

11.1.3 It is clear from the Vinaya that during the Buddha's lifetime up and within decades of his passing, the Vinaya *mahā'padesa* were in force, towards the end of the Buddha's life or very soon after, the Dharma Vinaya *mahā'padesa* were formulated to cover both monastic discipline and the teachings. This shows that the four human sources of disciplinary and doctrinal authority were superseded by some form of canon.

In this respect, the sermon on *mahāpadesa* might have been composed after the standard oral texts had been compiled, even though it is ascribed to the Buddha before he attains *parinibbāna*.³⁵⁵ This process of making a standard canon out of the oral tradition was the work of monks when the saṅgha had settled into a relatively developed monastic life in a set of self-governed colonies. (An Yang-Gyu 2002b:58)

It is obvious, as Gombrich notes, that "from the first the institution which performed the function of preserving the Buddhist texts much have been the Sangha" and such an endeavour "required organization, and that the Buddhist laity were never organized in a way which would have ensured the transmission of the texts down the generation" (1988:35).

11.2 ORIGIN AND NATURE OF THE GREAT REFERENCES

11.2.1 An important teaching given by the Buddha on the preservation of the teaching as text or tradition (*āgama*), but which is also related to the 37 limbs of awakening, are **the 4 great references** (*mahāpadesa*) [§§4.7-11, qv], which serve as a tool for the criteria of the true teaching.³⁵⁶ The term *apadesa* means "designation, pointing out; reference; witness, authority" (DP). However, in this context, it is best rendered as "reference" since we actually have only two final "authorities," that is, the Dharma (the suttas or discourses) and the Vinaya (the discipline) (V 2:118). This teaching is also found in **the Mahā'padesa Sutta** (A 4.180/2:167-170).

11.2.2 The Mahā,vagga of **the Vinaya**, however, has its own, probably older, "4 great references," comprising four criteria for judging the propriety of an act or situation that is not covered by current rules:

- (1) Whatever has not been ruled as not allowable,
if it fits in with what is not allowable (*akappiya*) and goes against what is allowable,
that is not allowable.
- (2) Whatever has not been ruled as not allowable,
if it fits in with what is allowable (*kappiya*) but goes against what is not allowable,
that is allowable.
- (3) Whatever has not been ruled as not allowable,
if it fits in with what is not allowable and goes against what is allowable,
that is not allowable.
- (4) Whatever has not been ruled as not allowable,
if it fits in with what is allowable and goes against what is not allowable,
that is allowable.
(Mv 6.40.3 @ V 1:250)

The Vinaya further has what is called the "Vinaya of presence" (*sammukhā,vinaya*), applicable to any of the four ways of settling legal cases (*adhikaraṇa,samatha*)³⁵⁷ (V 2:88-93), where the fourfold presence comprises the following:

1. the accused party (individuals);
2. the Sangha or quorum;
3. the Vinaya (ie the proper rules of procedure); and
4. the Dharma (ie the right and just application of the rules to the case).
(V 2:74, 99-94, 4:207; A 1:99; DhsA 144; V:H 5:117-125; Dutt 1984:129 f; cf M 2:247 ff)

11.2.3 The *mahā'padesa* passage of the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta strikingly parallels the *sammukhā,vinaya* passage both in form and content:

³⁵⁵ Buddhaghosa says that this teaching is given during the Buddha's last journey (AA 3:158).

³⁵⁶ See Nett:Ñ 37n; Gethin 2002:237-240, on which this section is mainly based; An Yang-Gyu, "Canonization of the Word of the Buddha," 2002b.

³⁵⁷ *Adhikaraṇa* is also tr as "legal question" (V:H 5:125-140), "legal dispute," and "litigation" (M:ÑB 855). The 4 ways of settling a legal question (*adhikaraṇa*) are: (1) a question of legal dispute (*vivādādhikaraṇa*); (2) a question of censure (*anuvādādhikaraṇa*); (3) a question regarding an offence (*āpattādhikaraṇa*); and (4) a question regarding a duty (*kiccādhikaraṇa*). See **Sāma,gāma S** (M 104.12-20/2:247-250).

We find a striking parallelism in structure and words between *mahāpadesa* and *sammukhāvinaya*; the four human sources of *mahāpadesa* appear in the *sammukhāvinaya*. And the qualifications of these human sources are described in almost exactly the same words. This *sammukhāvinaya* treats the Buddha as the final authority, before him a saṅgha, then a group of monks, and lastly a single monk, but *mahāpadesa* in [the Mahā Parinibbāna sutta] subordinates these four sources, beginning with the Buddha,³⁵⁸ to the texts of the *sutta* and the *vinaya*. (An Yang-Gyu 2002b:61)

In a similar observation, George Bond suggests that the use of the term *sammukhā* in the *mahāpadesa* implies a reference to a *sammukhā,vinaya* proceeding (1982:25-28). An Yang-Gyu concurs, adding

It is not unreasonable to assume that *sammukhāvinaya*³⁵⁹ was practised to settle the disputes over *dhamma* and *vinaya* during the Buddha's lifetime, while *mahāpadesa* was invented on the basis of *sammukhāvinaya* for the same purpose after the Buddha's *parinibbāna*. I would further like to suggest that even if there were fixed authoritative texts, they were not more authoritative than the Buddha while he was alive. But, after the Buddha's death the settled texts assumed the Buddha's authority. After the Buddha's death, monks must have needed to organize the Buddha's words into the texts, which in due course become immovable authorities. *Mahāpadesa* is a monastic device to make a standard canon which assumes supreme authority in the Buddha's absence. (An Yang-Gyu 200b 61)

11.2.4 The 4 great references (*mahāpadesa*) as found in the Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta [§4.7-11] and the Aṅguttara Nikāya (A 2:167-170),³⁶⁰ “signifies the pointing out or citing of someone as a witness or authority” with regard to some teaching (Cousins 1983:21). If someone (eg an elder monastic) claims to have heard or received a teaching:

- (1) from the Blessed One's own mouth; or
- (2) from a community [saṅgha] with elders, with distinguished teachers;³⁶¹ or
- (3) from many elder monks who are well learned, masters of scripture, Dharma-experts, Vinaya-experts, experts in the Summaries [Matrices];³⁶² or
- (4) from an elder monk who is well learned, master of scripture, Dharma-expert, Vinaya-expert, expert in the Summaries [Matrices]³⁶³—

“Then, bhikkhus, you should neither approve nor disapprove of his word.

Neither approving nor disapproving, his words and syllables (*pada,vyañjanāni*) should be carefully studied and checked against (*otāretabbāni*) the sutta³⁶⁴ [teaching] and examined (for conformity) (*sandassetabbāni*) against the Vinaya [discipline].

If, upon such checking [collating] and examining,

they are found to conform neither to the Sutta nor to the Vinaya,
then it should be concluded: ‘Surely, this is not the Blessed One's word.

It has been wrongly understood by this monk,’ and the matter is to be rejected.

But where, upon such checking [collating] and examining,

they are found to conform to the Sutta and the Vinaya,
then it should be concluded, ‘Surely, this is the Blessed One's word.

³⁵⁸ An Yang-Gyu: “Surely the Buddha himself is not subordinated, but a proposal ascribed to the Buddha is.” (fn)

³⁵⁹ “The term [*mahāpadesa*] could simply mean ‘face to face,’ ‘from the mouth of’; in other contexts it is used as part of an oath asserting the truth of a teaching or belief (eg M 3:119). Both *mahāpadesa* and *sammukhāvinaya* refer to the same procedure and criteria of authority.” (An Yang-Gyu 2002b:61 n30)

³⁶⁰ Also at Nett 21; see Nett:Ñ 37n.

³⁶¹ *Saṅgho...sa-t,thero sa,pāmokkho*.

³⁶² *Sambahulā therā bhikkhū...bahussutā āgat'āgamā dhamma,dharā vinaya,dharā mātikā,dharā*.

³⁶³ *Eko thero bhikkhū...bahussuto āgat'āgamo dhamma,dharo vinaya,dharo mātikā,dharo*.

³⁶⁴ “Checked against the Sutta,” *sutte otaranti*, lit “they descend into the Sutta.” This unusual expression is “best interpreted in the light of the *Peṭṭakōpadesa* tradition where *otaraṇā* is one of the sixteen *hāras*” [Peṭk 11, 98-101, 157 etc; Nett 21 f, 63-70, 107; Nett:Ñ xl, 1, 37 n125/1] (Cousins 1983:3). Cf Jaini (ed), *Abhidharma,dīpa*, Patna, 1977: Intro p27 on Nett.

It has been rightly understood by this elder.’

(D 16,4.7-11/2:123 f), SD 9

11.2.5 Lamotte distinguishes a two-stage of the 4 great references: the external and the internal. The first stage, or “external” criterion, consists in the monk’s appeal to the 4 great references to support this claim that a teaching represents Dharma, Vinaya and the Teacher’s teaching, that is, by way of the “Vinaya of presence” mentioned above. The Vinaya contains a lengthy discussion on such cases of disputes (*vivādādhikaraṇa*) regarding the proper definition of Dharma Vinaya, and the prescribed methods for settling them (V 2:88-104).

The second stage, or “internal” criterion, according to **George Bond**, is the new element in the great references, that “the bhikkhu must apply to a saying as *dhmma, vinaya* and *satthu sāsana*” (1982:28). **Lamotte** (1947:221) rejects Buddhaghosa’s interpretations (DA 565-568) that at the both *sutta* and *vinaya* refer to parts of the Vinaya Piṭaka, with *sutta* referring to its “pithy sayings”; and that the two terms could also refer to the two Piṭakas (the *Sutta,piṭaka* and the *Vinaya,piṭaka*), or to all three Piṭakas (where *sutta* refers to both the *Sutta,-piṭaka* and the *Abhidhamma,piṭaka*).

11.2.6 The very existence of such a formula as the great references reflects the unsettled state of the canon. In fact, the various interpretations given by Buddhaghosa supports the purpose of the great references: that a statement should be checked against an established body of teachings, and that only those that are compatible with this established corpus should be accepted (DA 567). George Bond provides this insight:

Rather than implying completed texts, *sutta* and *vinaya* probably referred to essential doctrines and basic rules which existed side by side in some form of oral tradition. The view of what these terms might have meant is supported by another text in the Theravada tradition, the *Netti-Pakaraṇa*. (1982:29)

S Dutt, in his *Early Buddhist Monachism*, remarks that the 4 great references of the Vinaya are “the material sources” of Buddhist monastic law (2nd ed 1984:21). However, while the Buddha himself is the “formal source”—that from which the rule of law derives its force and validity—the “material sources” are the Dharma Vinaya. These great references are only special provisions for deciding the propriety of an act or situation.

11.3 TEXTUAL AUTHORITY AND PERSONAL AUTHORITY. An earlier form of hermeneutical tool for settling doctrinal disputes is found in **the Kinti Sutta** (M 103) which records that the Buddha, after listing the list of “the 7 sets” [10.3], declares to the monks (and all practitioners) that

in these things you should all train in concord, with mutual appreciation, without disputing.

While you are training in concord, with mutual appreciation, without disputing, two monks might make different assertions with regard to the Dharma (*abhidhamme*)... (M 103,3-4/2:239 f)

The Buddha goes on to point out how the monks should settle any differences regarding the spirit [meaning] (*attha*) or the letter [phrasing] (*vyañjana*) of the teaching by amicably reasoning them out. The Majjhima Commentary glosses *abhidhamme* as referring to the 7 sets (MA 4:29). This important passage³⁶⁵ on the resolution of doctrinal problems is a good example of early Buddhist hermeneutics is found in a slightly expanded version in **the Pāsādika Sutta** (D 29).³⁶⁶

It is interesting to note that in **the Kinti Sutta** (M 103), the Buddha makes an exception of the third method of resolving doctrinal conflict,³⁶⁷ that is, agreeing about the spirit but differing about the letter of the teaching, “but the phrasing is a mere trifle. Let the venerable ones not fall into a dispute over a mere trifle” (M 103,7/-2:240). However, in the *Adhikaraṇa Vagga* of the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, the Buddha points out that the wrong expression of the spirit and of the letter are two factors responsible for the distortion and disappearance of the true Dharma (A 2.20/1:59). In this light, the instruction given in the *Kinti Sutta* should be understood that “slight deviations from the correct phrasing are not necessarily an obstacle to a proper understanding of the meaning” (Bodhi, M:ÑB 1310 n972).³⁶⁸

Both these hermeneutical systems regard the Dharma as the final authority, and as such, functions very much like the 4 great references, of which they are clearly their predecessors and, very likely, their prototypes.

³⁶⁵ M 103.5-8/2:239-241.

³⁶⁶ See **Mahā Sakul’udāyi S** (M 77), SD 16.18 (1.2).

³⁶⁷ The four sources of doctrinal problems centre around: (1) differing about both the spirit [meaning] and the letter [phrasing]; (2) differing about the spirit but agreeing about the letter; (3) agreeing about the spirit but differing about the letter; (4) agreeing both about the spirit and the letter.

³⁶⁸ The scribal tradition of the Pali texts, for example, is full of variant readings and wrong readings, which could all be resolved through careful comparative study of the various other texts (Pali, Sanskrit and various translations) and most important of all, from the living transmission of practitioners (such as forest monks and meditators).

The “great references” comprise two aspects: the sources and the authorities. This is clearly a device to transfer scriptural authority from the person to the text, introduced just before or soon after the Buddha’s passing as the Buddhist community has grown into far flung areas of northern India where living authorities were hard to come by or might be misrepresented.³⁶⁹ The formulation of these 4 great references or criteria also entails that there is some form of fixed canon or some early collection such as **the Saṅgīti Sutta** (D 33) and **the Das’uttara Sutta** (D 34).³⁷⁰

Mahāpadesa consists of two levels: the first concerns the human sources and the second provides the two authorities which should control the sources. We can see that the three human sources, let alone the Buddha, are all described as so well qualified that they themselves can play an authoritative role. They are all under the authority of the Buddha while he is alive. However, as monasticism developed after the Buddha’s *parinibbāna*, these human sources who used to be under the Buddhas came under the power of the final authority, namely, a definitive collection of texts. In effect, as these human sources are subject to the fixed texts of the *Sutta* and *Vinaya*, “new developments were ruled out, at least on the explicit level.” [Reginald Ray 1994:366] (An Yang-Gyu 2002b:57)

The 4 great references reject the decisiveness of appeal to human authorities. Instead, they propose that the words and the letters (*pada, vyañjanāni*) (Buddhaghosa) or the spirit and the letter (Dhammapāla) of those teachings “should be carefully studied and checked against the Sutta and examined (for conformity) against the Vinaya.” Such a scheme should understandably have envisaged a more cenobitical life, comprising of at least small communities of monks in settled dwellings.

The 4 great references are vital as criteria to *the oral tradition* of early Buddhism for winnowing the grain of Dharma from the husk of wrong view. Without any written scripture, the early Buddhists had to rely on a special code of cross-checking with one another through recital of the teachings—by a proficient individual, or an expert group, or the community itself. The core teachings of the early Dharma is, as evident from a number of early Suttas, the 37 limbs of awakening (*bodhi, pakkhiya, dhammā*).

Lamotte, in his paper, “The assessment of textual authenticity in Buddhism” (1983/84), reflecting on the fact that early Buddhism lacks an agreed and fixed canon of scriptures (mainly because here the Dharma is orally transmitted), says:

In order that a text proposed with reference to one of the 4 great Authorities [*mahā’padesa*] be guaranteed, it is not necessary for it to be literally produced in the Scriptures, it is enough that its general purport be in keeping with the spirit of the Sūtras, the Vinaya and the Buddhist doctrines in general.

(Lamotte 1983-84:4-15; see also 1988a:163 f)³⁷¹

Lamotte goes on to cite **the Netti-p, pakaraṇa** in this connection. As mentioned earlier, LS Cousins, in his paper, “Pali Oral Literature” (Denwood & Piatigorsky 1983), too, suggests that that the particular terms of the *mahā’padesa* passage (*otaranti* and *sandissanti*) should be understood in the light of traditions preserved in **the Peṭakōpadesa** and **Netti-p, pakaraṇa** (1983:2 f). According to these quasi-canonical texts, such categories as the aggregates (*khandha*), sense-spheres (*āyatana*), elements (*dhātu*), truths (*sacca*) and dependent arising (*paṭicca, -samuppāda*) are to be used to analyze the contents of a discourse and place it in its context in the teaching as a whole.

³⁶⁹ See An Yang-Gyu 2002b 57 f.

³⁷⁰ **The Saṅgīti S** (D 33) opens by stating that the Buddha is staying in the mango grove of Cunda the smith at Pāvā (D 33.1.1/3:207) [cf 4.13-20] and also gives the occasion for Sāriputta’s teaching was the death of Mahāvīra (the founder of Jainism), following which there was a schism in the Jain order. Discounting the anachronism problem here (Mahāvīra is believed to have died c 527 BC at Pāvā, long before the Buddha), the purpose of the sutta is clear: to provide a list of authentic teachings. **The Das’uttara S** (D 34), a record of Sāriputta’s teaching at Campā, is mostly a rearrangement of D 33. Cf Gethin 1992:162 & An Yang-Gyu 2002b:59 f.

³⁷¹ In an earlier translation work, the *Le Traité de la grande vertu de sagesse de Nāgārjuna*, Lamotte notes that in later Buddhism [esp the written tradition of the Mahāyāna] that it is increasingly the intrinsic merits of the text itself that determines its acceptance or otherwise as the authentic Buddha word (1944-70 1:80), qu an Aṅguttara passage: “Whatever is well said, all that is the Blessed One’s word” (*yaṃ kiñci subhāsitaṃ sabbam taṃ bhagavato vacanam*, A 4:164) (id 84 n2). <http://dharmafarer.org>

What is envisaged for sutta is not then a set body of literature, but rather a traditional pattern of teaching. Authenticity lies not in historical truth, although that is not doubted, but rather in whether something can accord with the essential structure of the *dhamma* as a whole. If it cannot, it should be rejected. If it can, then it is to be accepted as the utterance of the Buddha. We may compare from the later commentarial tradition: “Whoever... might teach and proclaim the *dhamma*, all that is accounted as actually taught and proclaimed by the Teacher.” (Cousins 1983:3)

11.4 SCRIBAL TRADITIONS. Theravāda, as a direct descendent of early **Nikāya Buddhism**, has a definite and common corpus of sacred literature, the **Pali Canon**, orally handed down since the Nikāya period, as the final authority. The difference amongst the various orders (*nikāya*) of the Theravada—that is, between the Mahānikāya and the Thammayut in Thailand, or between the Thudhamma and the Shwegyin in Burma, or the caste-based Siyam, Amarapura and Rāmañña Nikāyas in Sri Lanka—are their interpretation of the **Vinaya**, not of the Dharma.

The Mahāyāna, on the other hand, is a **scribal tradition**: they rely on written texts, but not all the texts have equal authority since each school within the Mahāyāna rely on a particular text or group of texts. Candrakīrti, for example, looks to the Akṣaya,mati Nirdeśa Sūtra; for Tiantai, it is the Lotus Sutra; for the Huayan, the Avatamsaka Sūtra; for the Yogācāra, the Saṃdhi, nirmocana; and Kukai’s Shingon school centres around Tantric texts. What keeps these schools apart, in theory at least, is their interpretation of the Dharma (although in some cases, of the Vinaya, too).

It is clear that both the Mahāyāna and non-Mahāyāna (or Hīnayāna) Buddhists see the need for the preservation of their sacred texts. As Reginald Ray notes in his *Buddhist Saints in India*, “In monastic life, great importance is attached to the preservation and mastering of the sacred texts” (1994:399). Buddhaghosa, however, defines the Sutta as the “three baskets” (*tipiṭaka*) handed down to his own Sri Lankan school, “so as to justify the authority of the school’s texts, rejecting the opposing camps’ texts” (An Yang-Gyu 2002b 65).

The 4 great references of Nikāya Buddhism, however, as we have seen, reject any human authority (including Buddhaghosa), relying, like the early Mahāyāna, on **scriptural authority**, reflected in such texts as the **Catuḥpratisaraṇa Sūtra**:

Rely on the teaching, not the teacher.

Rely on the meaning, not the letter.

Rely on the definitive meaning (*nītārtha*), not the interpretive meaning (*neyārtha*).

Rely on insight (*jñāna*), not on sense-consciousness (*vijñāna*). (Catuḥpratisaraṇa Sūtra)³⁷²

12 The lesser and minor rules

12.1 The Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta says that the Buddha, in his final instructions, briefly declares that, if the order so wishes, it could abrogate **the lesser and minor rules** (*khuddakānukhuddakā sikkhāpadā*) [§6.3]. Ānanda, however, fails to clarify with the Buddha what are the extent of these rules, so the elders of the Council of Rājagṛha decide not to make any changes to the rules. The Cullavagga (V 11.9/2:287 f) tells of how the monks at the First Council could not agree on which rules should be classed as lesser and minor. Ānanda himself confesses that he had neglected to ask the Buddha on this point. One of the monks made a motion that—since many of the rules affect the laity, and the laity would look down on the monks for rescinding them after the Buddha’s death—none of the rules should be rescinded. This motion was adopted by the Council.

12.2 Jotiya Dhirasekera, in his *Buddhist Monastic Discipline* (1981), says that “it is important to recognize the fact that there seems to have existed even during the time of the Buddha a category of sikkhāpadas which carried the designation ‘lesser and minor’ or *khudd[ak]ānukhuddaka*” (1981:165). In fact, (**Mattaso, kārī**) **Sikkhā S** (A 3.85) mentions the “lesser and minor rules” (*khuddakānukhuddakāni sikkhāpadāni*), saying that a virtuous disciples sometimes (unwittingly) transgress some of these rules but they rehabilitate themselves (A 3.85/1:231 f). Its Comy defines *khuddakānukhuddakāni* as referring to all the rules except the four “defeat” (*pārājika*) rule (AA 2:348), which leads Bhikkhu Bodhi to remark that the “stipulation here seems too liberal, for the other classes of the Vinaya rules certainly include precepts that are ‘fundamental to the holy life,’ such as the prohibitions against speaking a deliberate lies and against drinking intoxicants, both of which belongs to the Pācittiya class” (A:ÑB 288 n63).³⁷³

³⁷² For a discussion on these “four refuges,” see Piya Tan, *Teaching Methods of the Buddha* 2002: §22.

³⁷³ See Jotiya Dhirasekera, *Buddhist Monastic Discipline*, 1981:165-170. See also Piya Tan, *The Buddha and His Disciples*, ch 6 “The Buddha’s Image and Shadow,” §6.28; & Piya Tan, *The Buddha and His Disciples*, ch 6 “The Buddha’s Image and Shadow,” §6.28.

12.3 During the time of the First Council, the Vinaya records, the elders (it is not stated whether they were Council elder or others) are divided in opinion over what constitutes the lesser and minor rules (V 2:286 f). Strangely, while nowhere in the Vinaya or the Sutta are the lesser and minor rules defined, but in **the Milinda,-pañha** explain the “lesser rules” (*khuddakāni sikkhāpadāni*) as referring to those entailing wrong-doing (*dukkata*) and the “minor rules” (*anukhuddakāni sikkhāpadāni*) as those entailing “wrong speech” (*dubbhasita*) (Miln 145).

12.4 In the Dīgha Commentary, Buddhaghosa mentions that Mahā Kassapa, during the First Council, deliberated not to abolish the lesser and minor rules but to maintain the rules in too as they are (DA 2:592; V 2:288), especially when the Vinaya is the lifeblood of the Sangha (VA 1:13). In fact, even before the Buddha’s passing and before the First Council, the elder Upasena Vaṅganta,putta, younger brother of Sāriputta, had proposed that they “should not authorize what has not been authorized, and should not abolish what has been authorized, but conduct themselves in accordance with the promulgated training-rules,”³⁷⁴ and the Buddha approved of this (V 3:230 f).

12.5 As such, it is inexplicable that the Buddha should have allowed for the abrogation of the lesser and minor rules—which would be going against his own word! **The Milinda,pañha** discusses this possible dilemma: why did the Buddha promulgate the lesser and minor rules when he knows that he would allow them to be abolished after his passing; could it be then that he was not omniscient? Nāgasena replied that the Buddha had given the special allowance “to test the monks” (Miln 143).

12.6 The Mahāsaṅghika Vinaya, found in the Chinese translation, on the other hand, gives this interesting explanation:

Upāli tells the assembly:

“The Buddha told Ānanda thus: ‘When I am about to enter into nirvana, you should remind me so that I may abrogate the lesser and minor rules for the sake of the monks.’ But you did not tell him.”

(Taishō 22.49bc)

The same text goes on to account that the recalcitrant “group of six monks” (*cha-b,aggiya bhikkhū*) were the avid proponents of the abolition of the lesser and minor rules, and were most disappointed when this did not occur (id).

12.7 Having considered these important reasons and explanations with regards to the Buddha’s allowance for the abrogation of the lesser and minor rules, it might be safely said that it is a late tradition interpolated into the Mahā Parinibbāna. In fact, Jotiya Dhirasekera suggests in connection with the stratification of the Vinaya Khandhakas,³⁷⁵ it is possible that such discordant traditions could have been recorded “either out of choice or under pressure from within and without” (Dhirasekera 1981:170).

13 The Buddha’s last meal

13.1 WAS THE BUDDHA POISONED?

13.1.1 The Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta (D 16) mentions two occasions of physical illness of the 80-year-old Buddha during his last days. **The first attack** is at Beluva (Bilva) [§2.23] during the rains retreat. However, realizing that it would be a calamity if he were to die there, the Buddha mindfully suppresses his illness, thinking: “It would not be fitting for me to attain parinirvana without having addressed my followers, and without having taken leave of the order of monks.” (D 2:99).

The second attack occurs after the Buddha has eaten the meal offered by Cunda the smith³⁷⁶ at Pāvā (Skt Pāpā) (D 2:218). Again, for the same reason and using his mental powers, the Buddha suppresses the pain and illness, and continues his journey and teachings. Like **Socrates** who nobly drinks the hemlock deliberately

³⁷⁴ This is in fact the 3rd of the 7 conditions of non-decline (*aparihāniya, dhammā*) [1.6b(3)].

³⁷⁵ That is, the Cullavagga and the Mahāvagga (V vols 1-2), the historical sections of the Vinaya.

³⁷⁶ In the suttas, **Cunda** is called a “smith” or “metal smith” (*kammāra,putta*). Comys however say that he is a worker in gold (*suvaṇṇa,kāra,putta*), a wealthy householder who has become a streamwinner at first sight of the Buddha, and builds a residence (*vihāra*) for the Buddha and the monks in his mango grove (DA 2:568; SnA 159; UA 399). This event evidently occurred before those of Mahā Parinibbāna S. The Aṅguttara has the relatively long **Cunda Kammāra,putta S** (A 10.176/5:263-268), where Cunda takes refuge.

prepared by his executioners without bearing them the slightest ill-will, the Buddha graciously eats his portion of the “pig’s delight” offered by Cunda the smith, but bids the others refrain, and the rest of it should be buried.³⁷⁷

Of course, there is no question of ill intent on Cunda’s part, but the Buddha is concerned lest the man feel guilty, and consoles him with the remark that Cunda should rather be praised, because “the Tathāgata gained final Nibbana after taking his last meal from you!” [§4.42]. Since neither man [Buddha or Socrates] feels that his impending death is an evil thing to be avoided, it is only natural for them not to resent the proximate causes, but the sensitivity with which they communicate this to the person responsible is indicative again of the compassion that characterizes both men.

(Matthew Dillon, 2000:531)

13.1.2 Traditionally, it is said that the Buddha asks Cunda to bury the remainder of the *sūkara,maddava* because the gods have infused it with **divine essence** (*ojā/ūrjas*) as a tonic for the Buddha so that “no one in the world with its devas, with its Māra and its Brahmā, in this generation with its recluses and brahmins, its princes and people who, if they were to eat it, could thoroughly digest it except the Tathāgata.” (D 2:128; Bareau 1971:4).

In his notes, John Strong (2001:171) highlights the curious omission in the Pali account of an episode that is found in all the other versions of the Buddha’s last meal, that is, the mysterious and confused account of the “bad monk” who steals the bowl of food intended for the Buddha, thus forcing Cunda to prepare a second special meal, or who steals a bowl containing the leftovers of the meal (Bareau, 1970-71:258-264).

13.1.3 The Milinda,pañha discusses the dilemma confronting Cunda’s offering and the Buddha’s parinirvana, and concludes that

The last offering of food is of great advantage because of the Tathāgata’s attainment of *parinibbāna*. It was not because of the food that the illness fell upon the Blessed One but because of the **extreme weakness of his body and the proximity of death**. These two offerings of food were of great and incomparable merit because of the attainment of the nine successive dhyanas in forward and reverse order which the Tathāgata gained after partaking of that food.

(Miln 174-178; Miln:P 50 f. Pesala’s abr tr)

13.2 SŪKARA,MADDAVA: WHAT KIND OF DISH WAS IT REALLY?

13.2.1 After Bhoga,nagara, the Buddha and the order continue their last Dharma-tour together and arrive in **Pāvā** (Skt Pāpā), the town of the Mallas, across the Kakuṭṭha River from Kusinārā, to which it is connected by road. At **Pāvā**, the Buddha and the order stay at the mango grove of Cunda the smith, whose family prepare a sumptuous meal for them, abounding in “**pig’s delight**” (*sūkara,maddava*; Skt *sūkara,mārdava*).³⁷⁸ Apparently, the Buddha knows the nature of the “pig’s delight,” for he instructs that it only be served to him and the remainder is to be buried in a pit because, “Cunda, I can see no one in the world with its devas, Māra and Brahmā, in this generation with its recluses and brahmins, its princes and people who, if they were to eat it, could thoroughly digest it except the Tathāgata.” (D 2:128)³⁷⁹

13.2.2 Here, the pious commentarial traditions could not resist adding mythological colour to this important event in the Buddha’s life. The Sutta commentary remarks that “therein, the deities of the four great continents and the 2000 surrounding islands infused ambrosia (oja) into it.”³⁸⁰ According to **the Milinda,pañha**, whenever the Buddha eats, deities, bearing ambrosia, would stand close by and infuse each morsel with it as he takes it out of his bowl (Miln 231). **The Milinda,pañha** and **the Sutta Nipāta Commentary** mention three similar occasions, that is, when the deities infuse ambrosia into the following food:

- (1) Cunda’s *sūkara,maddava* while it is cooking (D 2:127,21);
- (2) As the Blessed One takes morsel after morsel of food at Verañja, while he eats the steamed grains of dried-up barley (V 3:6);³⁸¹ and
- (3) The left-over sugar in Belaṭṭha Kaccāyana’s sugar pot (V 1:225,17). (Miln 232; SnA 1:154)

The Milinda,pañha further mentions

³⁷⁷ See Matthew Dillon’s insightful comparison of the deaths of the two great men in “Dialogues with Death,” *Philosophy East and West* 50,4 Oct 2000:525-558.

³⁷⁸ Cf D:W 571 n417.

³⁷⁹ Cf Lamotte 1976:313 f.

³⁸⁰ *Tattha pana dvi,sahassa,dīpa,parivāresu catūsu mahā,dīpesu devatā ojaṃ pakkhipiṃsu* (DA 2:568).

³⁸¹ According to late accounts, in Phussa Buddha’s time, the Bodhisattva reviled monks for eating good food and told them to eat barley (*yava*) instead. As a result of this, he has to eat barley himself for 3 months (of the rains) at Verañja (Ap 1:300 f; UA 265).

(4) Sujātā's gift of sweet rice-milk (J 1:68 f; DhA 1:85 f).³⁸²

Thesūkara, *maddava* is apparently upsets the Buddha's stomach and he has a relapse of the dysentery he suffered earlier on at Beḷuva [§7]. Nevertheless, he bravely bears this new, less painful attack:

...the Lord was attacked by a serious illness with bloody diarrhoea, and with sharp pains as if he were about to die. But he endured all this mindfully and clearly aware, and without complaint.

(D 2:128)

Buddhaghosa gives 3 alternative meanings of the Pāli term *sūkara, maddava*:

- (1) the flesh from a single first-born wild pig, neither too young nor too old, which had come to hand naturally, that is, without intentional killing;
- (2) a preparation of soft boiled rice cooked with the 5 cow-products (milk, cream, buttermilk, butter, ghee);³⁸³
- (3) a kind of alchemic elixir (*rasāyana*). (DA 2:568)

Dhammapala, in his commentary to Udāna 8.5 adds two more interpretations:

- (4) young bamboo shoots trampled by pigs (*sūkarehi maddita, vamsa, kalira*);
- (5) mushrooms that arose at a spot where pigs had trampled upon. (UA 399)

In short, the ancient Commentators are not sure of the exact meaning of *sūkara, maddava*.

In the **Sarvastivadin account** of the Buddha's last days from the Chinese Āgama, there is no account of the kind of food the Buddha took, but in another version there is an addition after the statement about the meal:

Cunda had especially cooked sandal-mushrooms, which were looked upon all the world as a wonderful rarity, and offered these only to the Lord. The Lord said to Cunda, "Give not of these mushrooms to the monks." Cunda accepted the order, and did not venture to give them.³⁸⁴

This does not settle the question as to what the food really was, but only shows that the Chinese translator understood it in the same sense as some of the Pali Commentators (EJ Thomas, *The Quest for Enlightenment*, 1950:70).

13.2.3 The PED (sv "Sūkara"), in agreement with **RO Franke**, takes the term *sūkara, maddava* to be "soft (tender) boar' flesh" but Rhys Davids suggests "quantity of truffles," saying that it is important that the food prepared by Cunda and eaten by the Buddha is called *bhatta*, a term which is not used elsewhere of meat.³⁸⁵ An ancient Chinese translation of the Sutta renders the term as "the stew of the ear of the sandalwood tree" (a kind of wood-fungus).

Some modern scholars tend to favour "**truffles**" (a kind of underground edible fungus) as the translation of *sūkara, maddava*, but this is not without its critics. The main problem is that it is a misnomer, as truffles are not found in Bihar. Furthermore, Trevor Ling, in his *The Buddha's Philosophy of Man* (an unauthorized revision of Rhys Davids' translation), comments on Rhys Davids' footnote on *sūkara, maddava* (D:R 2:137 n31), thus:

This explanation seems intended to avoid offence to vegetarian readers or hearers. Rhys Davids' statement that Buddhists "have been mostly vegetarians, and are increasingly so," is difficult to accept. (1981:218 n31)

Walshe adds, in a charged note, saying:

Be that as it may (and in fact Eastern Theravāda Buddhists have rarely been vegetarians, though some are now, almost certainly under Western influence!), the question of vegetarianism has frequently been raised in the Buddhist field. (D:W 572 n417)

³⁸² The two most meritorious almsgivings to the Buddha are (1) Sujātā's sweet milk-rice (last meal before the Great Awakening), and (2) Cunda's *sūkara, maddava* (just before the Great Parinirvana) (Miln 174-177; UA 405).

³⁸³ V 1:244; DhA 1:158, 323, 397; SnA 322; VvA 147.

³⁸⁴ Unlike the mycophobic Indians (they regarded mushroom and similar growths as being impure), the mycophilic Chinese (they love all kinds of edible mushrooms), have no difficulty in accepting that the Buddha's last meal comprises this delicacy.

³⁸⁵ D:R 2:137,1; also Miln:R 1:244.1.

13.2.4 Although Rhys Davids notes that “it is important that the food prepared by Cunda and eaten by the Buddha is called *bhatta* [D 2:127]: this is not used elsewhere of meat” (D:R 2:137 n31), the term *bhatta* probably refers to the food offering as a whole (that is, including, but not only, the *sūkara, maddava*). Moreover, in reply to Devadatta’s proposal that the monks should take neither fish nor meat all life long, the Buddha declares that “fish and meat are pure in respect to three points: if one has not seen, heard or suspected (that they have been killed on purpose for one)” (V 2:197). In other words, vegetarianism is an option, not the rule, for the early Buddhist monastics.³⁸⁶

In the case of the **Ugga, the houselord of Vesālī** (A 5.44), the foremost of those who give pleasant gifts,³⁸⁷ it is clear that amongst his gifts is “**pork** (*sūkara, māmsa*) with a generous serving of jujube fruit” (A:W 3:41n) which the Buddha accepts “out of compassion” (A 3:49). However, it should also be noted that the Pali text is only one of two texts, out of all the early sources (Sanskrit, Chinese, Tibetan) that *specifically* mention the kind of food prepared by Cunda for the Buddha.³⁸⁸

Furthermore, the Buddha, *vamsa* Commentary gives a list of “30 points common to all the Buddhas” (*sama-timsa, vidhā dhammatā*), where item 29 says that “On the day of his final nirvana, he takes a meal that tastes of meat (*māmsa, rasa, bhojana*)” (BA 298). If we accept this tradition, it we are more certain that the Buddha’s last meal is a pork dish.

13.2.5 In 1958, **R Gordon Wasson and Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty** published a ground-breaking paper simply entitled, “The last meal of the Buddha,” the kind of which any Buddhist who love suttas will exult in and feel a sense of gratitude to these scholars. We might say that the mystery of the Buddha’s final meal is finally solved, according to the scholars at least. **Stella Kramrisch**, building on the work of **Roger Heim** and Gordon Wasson in eastern India, had identified with finality that *sūkara, maddava* is the *pūtika*, a plant that figures prominently in the Brāhmaṇas and other early post-Vedic sacred Sanskrit texts (Kramrisch 1975).

Now, the word *sūkara, maddava* is itself an anomaly, almost a hapax (appearing only once), that is, only in **the Mahā, parinibbāna** [§4.18-19] and excerpts from it (like **the Cunda Kammāra, putta Sutta**, U 8.5). For the main dish of such an important meal—the Buddha’s last—it is simply perplexing that the Commentaries are not really sure what it exactly is: pork stew, rich milk-rice, or alchemic elixir (DA 568); bamboo shoots, or mushrooms (UA 399)?³⁸⁹ Some scholars think that the explanations for *sūkara, maddava* was likely to have been introduced late in Asoka’s reign (3rd century BCE), and the word itself might have been a neologism “invented ad hoc.”³⁹⁰ In short, we can at least say that the Buddha’s last meal is highly unlikely to have been a pork dish.

Stella Kramrisch, in her researches, was able to identify the Sanskrit *pūtika* as a surrogate for the Vedic *soma*,³⁹¹ which was abandoned shortly after 1000 BCE due to difficulty in obtaining it.³⁹² In its place, *pūtika* (Santali *putka*),³⁹³ a kind of mushroom found in Bihar was used. Further, we need to note that brahmins and higher-class members abhorred mushrooms. The reasons were probably simple enough. Mushrooms tend to grow in rotting matter (such as trunks and cow-dung), and, as for *pūtika* (which means “having a rotting smell”), they must be eaten within hours of harvest, before they stink of rotting flesh!³⁹⁴

13.2.6 Now, **Cunda the metal smith** was the person who made the last meal-offering to Buddha. Some scholars contend that Cunda, being a shudra (a menial working class member), probably did not know about the aversion of the social elites to mushrooms, that is, *pūtika*. Since it was in season and a delicacy in that area, what better offering could Cunda make to the Buddha who was going to pass away soon. In fact, it is possible that Cunda had made a special preparation of the *pūtika* as a sort of elixir, hoping that it would lengthen the Buddha’s life (UA 400).

³⁸⁶ For a discussion on the meatless diet, see **Āmagandha S** (Sn 2.2), SD 4.24 Intro.

³⁸⁷ A 5.44/1:25.

³⁸⁸ For a discussion on the Buddha’s last meal and references, see John S Strong, *The Buddha: A short biography*, 2001:134-135.

³⁸⁹ For a long list of refs on scholars who discussed the identity of this mysterious dish, see Gordon Wasson & Flaherty 1982:591 n1.

³⁹⁰ Gordon Wasson & Flaherty 1982:600.

³⁹¹ Identified as the entheogenic (previously, hallucinogenic) mushroom, *Amanita muscaria* or fly agaric. See Gordon Wasson & O’Flaherty 1958:600 f, 603.

³⁹² See Gordon Wasson & O’Flaherty 1982:596.

³⁹³ Santali is the dialect of the Santal, who number in some millions, living in villages scattered in the Santal Parganas, in eastern Bihar, in the western north-south strip of West Bengal, and in Orissa as far south as teh Simlipal Hills. See Gordon Wasson & O’Flaherty 1958:594 f.

³⁹⁴ By the beginning of the Common Era, **the Manu, smṛti** (Laws of Manu), chs 4-5 listed “garlic, leeks, onions, mushrooms and whatever that arises from filth are unfit to be consumed by the twice-born.”

The Buddha, realizing that such a meal of mushrooms might offend the high-caste monks (clearly not awakened saints here) with such a dish, told Cunda to serve only him (the Buddha) with it, and to bury the rest in a pit. It is likely that the *pūtika* were already spoiling³⁹⁵ and giving off a strong smell; hence, they should be buried in the ground.

As the Buddha already had an earlier attack of dysentery at Beḷuva [§2.23], such a meal caused him a relapse. However, it did not kill him. He had already made a prediction of his death. Apparently, such predictions of impending death by a saint was (and is) not uncommon, as it belongs the ancient Indian tradition of *mahā-samādhi* or “great samadhi,” where the saint would voluntarily pass away in deep meditation.³⁹⁶ [9.6]

Of course, all this is hypothetical, but based on careful research. It certainly brings us closer to understanding how native diets are linked with their religions. A more historical understanding of how the Buddha lived, ate and died, is instructive in our accepting him as a human being who is able to transcend both humanity and divinity into an unconditioned state of spiritual freedom. It reminds us that despite our frailties, we are capable of rising above ourselves.

14 Dhamm’ārāma

14.1 A short but inspiring episode is found in the **Dhammapada Commentary** in connection with the Buddha’s statement on the “supreme worship” [§5.3.2]. The Dhammapada story opens in this manner:

From the day when the Teacher announced, “Four months [*sic*] hence I shall pass into parinirvana,” monks by the thousands spent their time attending to the Teacher and following him around. Those worldling monks wept. They who had destroyed their mental influxes, felt Dharma-samvega. But all went about in groups, saying, “What shall we do?”³⁹⁷ (DhA 4:93)

14.2 But, one monk, by the name of Dhamm’ārāma (Skt Dharm’ārāma), which means “one who delights in the Dharma,” kept to himself. And when they asked him, he gave them no answer. He thought to himself: “The Teacher has announced that 4 months hence he will pass away into nirvana [14.4], and I have not yet freed myself from the bondage of desire. Therefore so long as the Teacher remains alive, I will struggle and attain arhathood.”

14.3 The monks reported Dharm’ārāma’s aloofness to the Buddha and he was summoned. When the Buddha asked him if it was true that he was being aloof, Dharm’ārāma explained that he was trying hard to attain arhathood while the Buddha was yet alive and before he passed away into parinirvana. The Buddha applauded him.

Bhikshus, every other monk should show his affection to me just as Dhamm’ārāma has done. For they honour me with garlands, perfumes and the like, honour me not; but they that practise the Dharma in accordance with the Dharma, they alone truly honour me. (DhA 4:94)

Having said that, the Buddha pronounced the following Dhammapada stanza

The monk who dwells delighting in the Dharma,
Who reflects on the Dharma,
Who remembers the Dharma,
Does not fall away from the True Dharma. (Dh 364)

At the conclusion of the discourse, Dharm’ārāma was established in arhathood, and the assembly, too, profited from the discourse.

14.4 It is curious that the Dhammapada story mentions that the Buddha’s announcement of his impending parinirvana is made “4 months” instead of 3 *months* before the Parinirvana (as mentioned in the Mahā Parinib-

³⁹⁵ It should be remembered that Cunda, family and assistants spends *the whole night* preparing for the meal [§4.17].

³⁹⁶ See eg Sushila Blackman 1997.

³⁹⁷ *Sattthārā kira “ito me catu,mās’accayena parinibbānam bhavissatī ti ārocitre aneka,sahassā bhikkhū sattthārāṃ parivāretvā vicarīṃsu. Tattha puthujjanā bhikkhū assūni sandhāretum nāsakkhīṃsu, khīṇāsavānaṃ dhamma,samvego uppajji. Sabbe’pi “kin nu kho karissāmī ti vaggā,bandhanena vicaranti.*

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bāna Sutta). There are two possibilities: the Buddha had made an earlier announcement, or the Dhammapada Commentary (Buddhaghosa) errs.

15 Aspects of (*pari*)*nibbāna*

15.1 NIBBĀNA AND PARINIBBĀNA

1.5.1 It should be noted that *parinibbāna* as used throughout this Sutta refer to the Buddha's "final passing away." This passing away is "final" in that there is no more rebirth for the Buddha (or any fully awakened being). However, the term *parinibbāna* is not always used in this sense. The oldest Pali texts³⁹⁸ mention two aspects of *nibbāna* and of *parinibbāna*, where both the terms are identical in meaning. Partly due to the usage of the term *parinibbāna* in this Sutta, where it describes the Buddha's final passing away—the "final nirvana"—the term is often associated (exclusively) with the "death" of the Buddha or an arhat.³⁹⁹ Moreover, Rhys Davids' Pali-English Dictionary perpetuates this error.⁴⁰⁰ **E J Thomas**⁴⁰¹ remarks that "Even the Buddhists of Ceylon have the same idea [that *parinibbāna* means final *nibbāna* or *nibbāna* attained at death with the complete dispersal of the *skandhas*], probably because they follow Rhys Davids [ie the Pali Text Society's *Pali-English Dictionary*] more closely than the Pali texts."

1.5.2 Some scholars have also endorsed this error: **A K Warder**,⁴⁰² for example, says that "The prefix *pari* is generally used when referring not to *nibbāna* itself as a state, but to the event of an individual's (final) attainment of it at the end of his worldly life." Modern scholars like FUJITA Kōtatsu,⁴⁰³ K R Norman, Bodhi⁴⁰⁴ and Jan Nattier⁴⁰⁵ are well aware of this problem. **K R Norman** disagrees with Warder and prefers Thomas' view, but agreeing that "the difference between *nibbāna* and *parinibbāna* is a grammatical one." (1995:216 f)

[E J Thomas] clarified the relationship between *nibbāna* and *parinibbāna* long ago, referring⁴⁰⁶ to E Kuhn's explanation [untraced] that "*pari* compounded with a verb converts the verb from the expression of a state to the expression of the achievement of an action." He states, "**Nirvāṇa is the state of release; *parinirvāṇa* is the attaining of that state.** The monk *parinirvāṇi* 'attains *nirvāṇa*' at the time of enlightenment as well as at death"....

Thomas...elaborated the same explanation,⁴⁰⁷ "He *parinibbāyati*, attains the state, and then *nibbāyati*, is in the state expressed by *nibbāna*." (K R Norman, 1995:217; my emphasis)

"It is clear, therefore, that the difference between *nibbāna* and *parinibbāna* is not that of *nibbāna* in life and *parinibbāna* at death" (Norman, 1995:216).

15.2 NIRVANA: 2 KINDS AND 3 KINDS. Later, medieval scholars expanded the usages of the term *parinibbāna*. Buddhaghosa, in his Dīgha Commentary, for example, speak of 3 kinds of *parinirvāṇa* connected with the Buddha, namely, that of the defilements (*kilesa parinibbāna*), that of the aggregates⁴⁰⁸ (*khandha parinibbāna*), and that of his bodily relics (*dhātu parinibbāna*) (DA 899 f).⁴⁰⁹ The first, also known as "nirvana with residue (of the aggregates)" (*sopādi, sesa nibbāna*), according to Buddhaghosa, took place under the Bodhi tree during the awakening (It 44).⁴¹⁰

³⁹⁸ Cf DhA 2:163.

³⁹⁹ K R Norman, "Mistaken Ideas about *Nibbāna*." In *The Buddhist Forum* 3, ed Skorupski & Pagel, London, 1995:216. This section is a summary of the salient points in this insightful article.

⁴⁰⁰ PED 427, under *Parinibbāna*.

⁴⁰¹ E J Thomas. "Nirvāṇa and Parinirvāṇa," in *India Antiqua* (Festschrift for Jean Philippe Vogel), Leiden, 1947: 294 f. See also R. Gombrich, *Precepts and Practice*, Oxford, 1971:70 n14.

⁴⁰² A K Warder, *Introduction to Pali*, London, 1963:49 n1.

⁴⁰³ FUJITA Kōtatsu, "Genshi bukkyō ni okeru nehan—*nibbāna* to *parinibbāna*." *Indogaku bukkyōgaku kenkyū* 1988 37,1:1-12.

⁴⁰⁴ S:B 1:49-52.

⁴⁰⁵ Jan Nattier, *A Few Good Men*, Honolulu, 2003:148 n26.

⁴⁰⁶ E J Thomas, *The History of Buddhist Thought*, London, 1933:121 n4.

⁴⁰⁷ E J Thomas. "Nirvāṇa and Parinirvāṇa," 1971:294 f.

⁴⁰⁸ The aggregates here comprise form, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness. See n1.

⁴⁰⁹ Cf DhA 2:163 where 2 kinds of *parinibbāna* are distinguished.

⁴¹⁰ See *Nibbāna, dhātu S* (It 4/2.2.7/38 f), SD 98.13.

The second, the “nirvana without residue of clinging” or simply “nirvana without residue” (*nirupādi, sesa nibbāna*), is the parinirvana at Kusinārā (a view, as have seen, differing from that of the early texts).⁴¹¹ It should be noted here that we have only the notion of the 2 kinds of nirvana in the suttas (It 44)⁴¹² [§5.8]

The third kind of *parinirvāna* refers to the end of the Dispensation, that is, the final disappearance of the Buddha’s teaching.⁴¹³ Clearly, the idea of the 3 nirvanas is a post-Buddha notion.

The Pali term *upādi* (“clinging,” from *upa + ā + dā* “to take”) is often confused with the Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit *upādhi* (meaning “remnant, substrate,” or better, “birth-basis” or “accumulation,” attachment to which leads to rebirth).⁴¹⁴ Despite the subtle but important difference in meaning, most modern commentators regard them as synonymous, and do not try to explain how and why the difference arose. (Norman 1995:215)⁴¹⁵

16 Political conditions

16.1 THE 16 GREAT STATES (MAHĀ, JANAPADA). Now we will look at the general political conditions of north central India (especially the Gangetic Basin). The territorial organization of the state is often described as comprising villages (*gāma*), market towns (*nigama*), the countryside (*janapada*), the city (*nagara*), and the frontier (*paccanta*). The frontier’s security was often a matter of anxiety for the rulers as it was often in a state of unrest. A “village” (*gāma*) ranged from a single household of an extended family to several hundred households of many families, whose main occupation were agriculture, arts and crafts for manufacturing tools. A “market town” (*nigama*), here generally referred to a trading village or town, whose main activity was the bartering or sales of commodities.⁴¹⁶

<u>Country/State</u>	<u>Capital & towns</u>	<u>Modern districts</u>
1. Aṅga	Campā (Bhagalpur) Bhadrikā (P: Bhaddiyā) Aśvapura (P: Assapura)	Bengal
2. Magadha	Rājagṛha or Girivraja (Rajgir)	Southern Bihar
3. Kāśī (P Kāśī)	Vārāṇasī (Banaras)	Banaras/Vārāṇasī
4. Kośala	Śrāvastī (Saheth Maheth) Sāketa (Ayodhyā)	Oudh
5. Vṛjī (P Vajjī)	Vaiśālī (Besarh) of the Licchavis Mithilā (Janakpur) of the Videhas	Northern Bihar
6. Malla (<i>Malloi</i>)	Pāvā (Padaraona) Kuśinagara (P: Kusinārā; modern Kasia)	Gorakhpur
7. Caitya (P Ceḍī)	Śuktimati Sahajāṭī Tripurī	Bundelkhand (Vindhya region, northern Madhya Pradesh)
8. Vatsā (P Vaṁsā)	Kauśāmbī (P: Kosambī; modern Kosam)	Allahābād
9. Kuru	Indraprastha (Delhi) Hastinapura	District of Thānesar, Delhi & Meerut
10. Pañcāla	N. Ahicchatra (Rāmnagar) S. Kāmpilya (Kampil)	Rohilkhand, central Doāb
11. Matsya (P Maccha)	Virāṭa (Bairāt)	Jaipur
12. Śūrasena (P Śūrasena)	Mathurā	Mathurā (Muttra)

⁴¹¹ Norman: “The Buddha was a tathāgata; he had attained *nibbāna*, but he was still alive and with his followers, ie the attainment of this state made no obvious difference to his physical state. Perhaps it was as the result of difficulties such as this that the idea of two *nibbānas* arose” (1991:2 = 1993:253). See Thomas 1933:131 f.

⁴¹² See parable 5 of the 8 parables in **Pahārāda S** (A 8.19,15) +SD 45.18 (2.5.2).

⁴¹³ On the disappearance of the Dharma, see Piya Tan, *The Buddha and His Disciples*, 2004:6.22.

⁴¹⁴ See SD 28.11 (3.2).

⁴¹⁵ See **The unconscious**, SD 17.8b (4.4).

⁴¹⁶ See Gokhale 1994:51 f, 125; Chakravarti 1987:19, 22 f.

13. Aśmaka or Aśvaka (P Assaka) (<i>Assakenus</i>)	Potali or Potana (Bodhan)	Nizam
14. Avantī*	Ujjayinī (Ujjain), (P: Ujjenī) Māhiṣmati	Mālwā & Nimār
15. Gandhārā or Yonā*	Takṣaśilā (P: Takka,sīlā)	District of Peshāwār & Rawalpiṇḍi
16. Kambojā		SW Kāśmīr & Kāfiristān

(A 1:213 = 4:252 f. = Nc 247) [See Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism*, 1988a:8]

Names in *italics*, eg *Malloi*, are those found in ancient Greek writings. An asterisk (*), eg “Avantī*,” denotes that it is outside the Middle Country (**about the size of Malaysia**, or England and Wales).

During the 8th through 6th centuries BCE, north central India was going through economic growth and urbanization, as reflected in the terms, *mahā janapada* and *janapada*. The term *janapada* assumed a new broader meaning and connotes “both a territory and its people and may be translated as a realm, state, domain, nation, geopolitical region, or simply region.”⁴¹⁷ Of these regions, sixteen of them—the *mahā janapada* or “great states”—wield significant political power or sovereignty. Most of these great states are mentioned in the Pali Canon and Commentaries (compiled in Sri Lanka),⁴¹⁸ and also mentioned in earlier sources, such as the Late Vedic texts or the Jain sources or both.

Some of these sixteen great states (*soḷasā mahā janapadā*), such as **Kāsī, Kosala, Kuru-Pañcāla, Maccha** (Skt **Matsya**), **Gandhārā and Kambojā**, had existed long before and were mentioned on the Vedic literature. The rest, such as Aṅga, Magadha, Vajjī (Skt Vṛjī), Malla, Ceḍī, Vaṃsā (Skt Vatsā), Sūrasena, Assaka (Skt Aśmaka) and Avantī, were new states that arose from declining old ones or new areas coming into prominence. By the time of the Buddha, most of these regions were settled cultural entities in the face of dynamic political developments.

The crucial element in this process [the evolution and development of regional identities of peoples and the growth of regional powers] was the permanent settlement of various tribes, clans, colonizing families, and individual cultural regions. These were designated according to a variety of criteria: after the name of the tribe (eg, Kamboja, Gandhāra, Malla), after branches of tribes or clans (eg the Vaṃsa of the Kuru), after the confederate character of the tribes (eg, Kuru-Pañcāla and Vajjī), or after the name of some original colonizing hero (eg, Videha, Aṅga). (Schwartzberg 1992:166)

16.2 MONARCHIES AND CONFEDERACIES. There were two forms of political regions in the Middle Country.⁴¹⁹ Monarchies formed the central regions, while the oligarchic republics were generally found on the periphery of the Middle Country.

Among the reasons for the change from kingdoms to oligarchies was opposition to the increasing demands of the king for obedience, taxation, and other property contributions and of the entrenched Brahman priesthood for conformity to hierarchical, rather than egalitarian, sociocultural institutions and support of sacrificial religion. Moreover, religious sacrifices involving the slaughter of animals were injurious to the expanding cultivation economy of the Ganga Plain, in which cattle were needed as draft animals. Pastoralism, by contrast, was declining. Food preferences were changing in the direction of vegetarianism, and so cattle sacrifices were no longer desired for communal feasting.

The role of the northeastern republics is particularly significant in that they gave vent to their opposition to monarchical authoritarianism and priestly orthodoxy by espousing Buddhism, Jainism, and other heterodox sects that grew within their milieu and that advanced democratic social organization. (Schwartzberg 1992:167)

⁴¹⁷ Schwartzberg 1992:166.

⁴¹⁸ On the contents of the Pali Canon and Commentaries, see the Textual Conventions (SD Epilegomena). On the formation and nature of the Pali Canon, see KR Norman, *A Philological Approach to Buddhism*, 1997. The Canon and the earliest Commentaries may have reached Sri Lanka by the 3rd cent BCE. Between then and the 1st cent CE, they were translated into Sinhalese, and others were written in that language. In the 5th cent the greatest of the commentators, Buddhaghosa, reworked into Pali much of the earlier material, adding Dravidian commentaries and Sinhalese traditions. Within a century or two, others, notably Dhammapāla (south India), produced similar works on parts of the Canon that Buddhaghosa had not covered. See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahajanapadas>.

⁴¹⁹ See Schwartzberg 1992: plates III.B.1-4.

Late in the 6th century BCE, Kosala, Magadha, Vamsā and Avantī were the four great monarchies, and together with the republican Vajjī confederacy, composed the major regional powers of the Middle Country (*Majjhima,desa*, Skt *Madhya,deśa*) and the “Southern Route” (Skt *Dakṣiṇā,paṭha*, or modern Deccan). The Ikṣvāku (related to the P *Okkāka*)⁴²⁰ kings of Kosala, by ceding Kāsī, initiated a new process of territorial expansion

...marked by the organization of a regular army, usually under the command of the crown prince or a subordinate chieftain. This process reached its climax under the Magadhan kings, whose administrative machinery rivalled their highly developed military organization, enabling them to triumph in the struggle for empire that lasted about one hundred years in the central Ganga Plain.

(Schwartzberg 1992:166; see esp plate XIV.1 map(a))

As such, around or just before the Buddha’s time, a process of integration⁴²¹ was slowly gathering momentum amongst the great states (*mahā janapadā*), as is revealed in the pairing of their names in Buddhist sources, for example, Kuru-Pañcāla, Kāsī-Kosala, Malla-Vajjī, Aṅga-Magadha, Cedi-Vamsa and Maccha-Sūrasena. Similarly, Avantī was recognized as having two divisions at Ujjayinī and Māhismatī. As these states were merging, old monarchies began to decline internally. Some, such as Kuru and Pañcāla reverted to their previous form of oligarchic confederation (*saṅgha,raja*, Skt *saṅgha.rājya*). At the same time, new authoritarian monarchies (such as that of Ajāta,sattu, r 494-461) gained ascendancy.

The India of Buddha’s time was one of dynamic social changes with powerful monarchies displacing the old tribal confederacies. An agrarian village-based economy was being taken over by the growth of large towns and cities as mercantile and military bases. With the rise of cities, work and occupation became more specialized and people had more leisure. Such concentration of people with more free time and surplus income encouraged them in exchanges of ideas and the search for meaning in the social uprootedness.

It is significant that none of the *gaṇa,saṅgha* or tribal republic (such as the Sakyas) are listed amongst the sixteen great countries. While the monarchies (*āṇā,cakka*) were politically better organized, hence more stable, these republics had simpler socio-economic organization, and did not produce a wide range of goods. “But a more important reason for none of the cities of the *gaṇa-saṅghas* being listed as a *mahānagara* was that the *gaṇa-saṅghas* were suffering from problems of internal collapse.” (Chakravarti 1987: 21 f). With such combined social, economic and political factors, understandably the Buddha’s teaching of *dukkha* or existential angst captured the attention of many of his day.

16.3 RĀJAGAHA AND PĀṬALIPUTRA. From the little that we know for certain of the early Magadha empire, its early rise and growth appear to have begun with the conquest of Aṅga and control of the rich mineral (especially iron) and forest resources and the trade routes of the sea. Her military success was largely due to the use of elephants, the backbone of their military might.

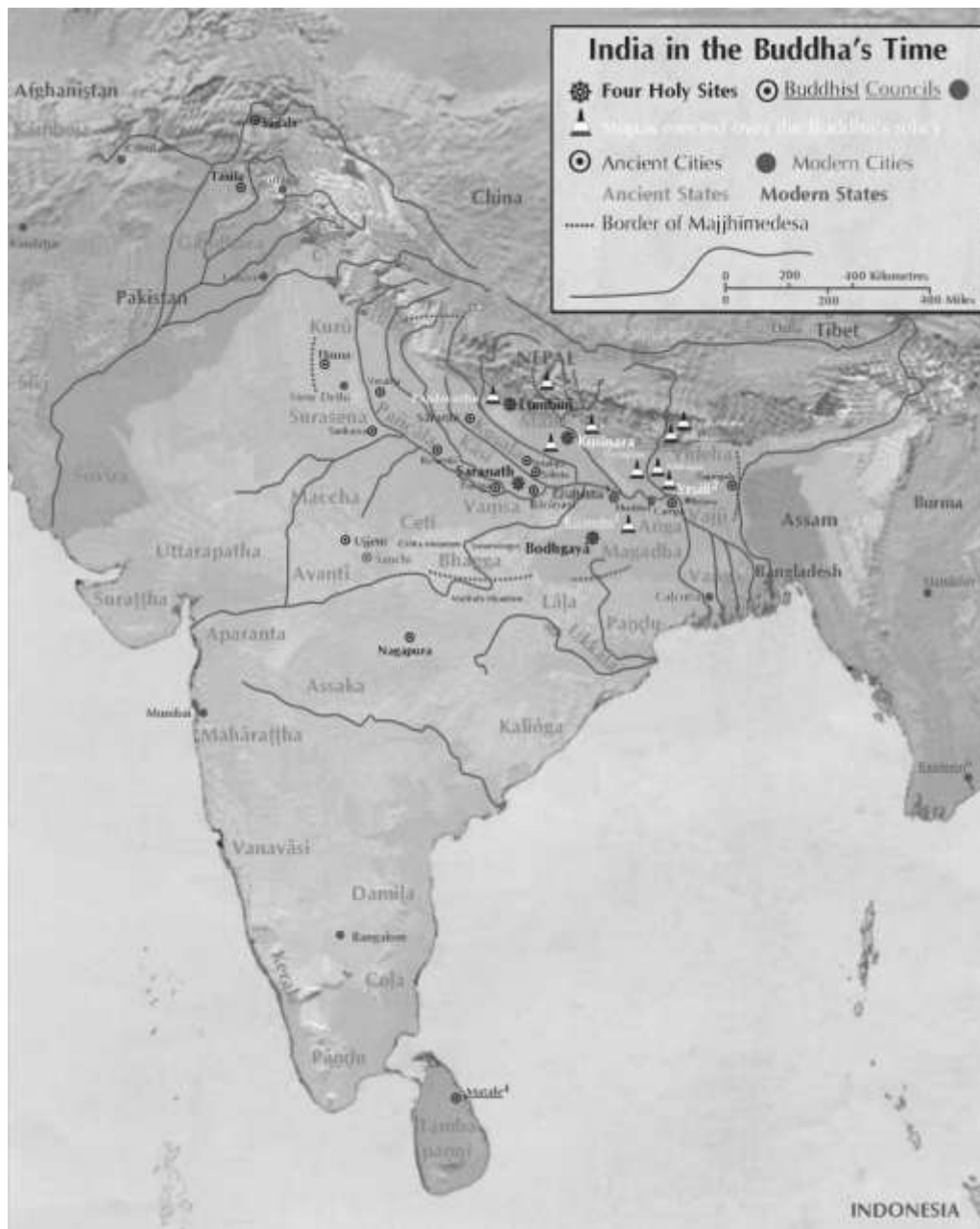
The fortifications of the Magadha capital, **Rājagaha**, were the strongest amongst the Magadha towns, but **Pāṭaliputta**—in the Buddha’s time, a town (*nagara*) called Pāṭali,gāma [§1.19]—was better located for further conquests and for effective control of the Ganges Plain and its growing trade. **Pāṭali,gāma** was a fortified village standing on the south bank of the Ganges between Rājagaha and Vesālī, that is, on the borders between Magadha and Vajjī country. Ajātasattu’s plans to expand Magadha to the north and west, however, was for a time prevented by the formidable Vajjī confederacy and its allies, the Mallas, together with their Kosala overlords.

⁴²⁰ Okkāka is mentioned in such suttas as **Ambaṭṭha S** (D 1:15 f/1:92) and **Brāhmaṇa,dhammika S** (Sn 284-315/52 ff); see also DA 1:258; AA 438, 4:69. “Although the Sanskritised form of the Pāli name is Ikṣvāku, it is unlikely that Okkāka is identical with the famous Ikṣvāku of the *Purāṇas*, the immediate son of Manu, son of the Sun. The Pāli is evidently more primitive, as is shown by the form Okkā,mukha, and the name Ikṣvāku looks like a deliberate attempt at accommodation to the Purāṇic account” (DPPN 462). See Thomas, *The Life of Buddha as Legend and History*, 1949:5-7.

⁴²¹ “Ironically, the contradiction between the republican way of life on the one hand and monarchy on the other was resolved in the emergence of the universal and autocratic empire of Magadha with its bureaucratic approach to regional integration. The new synthesis was consummated through a systematized land revenue policy and the promulgation, under Aśoka, of a universal moral code. The former regulated local property arrangements and sublimated kinship identities, while the latter stressed individual or family social and moral responsibility.” (Schwartzberg 1992:167)

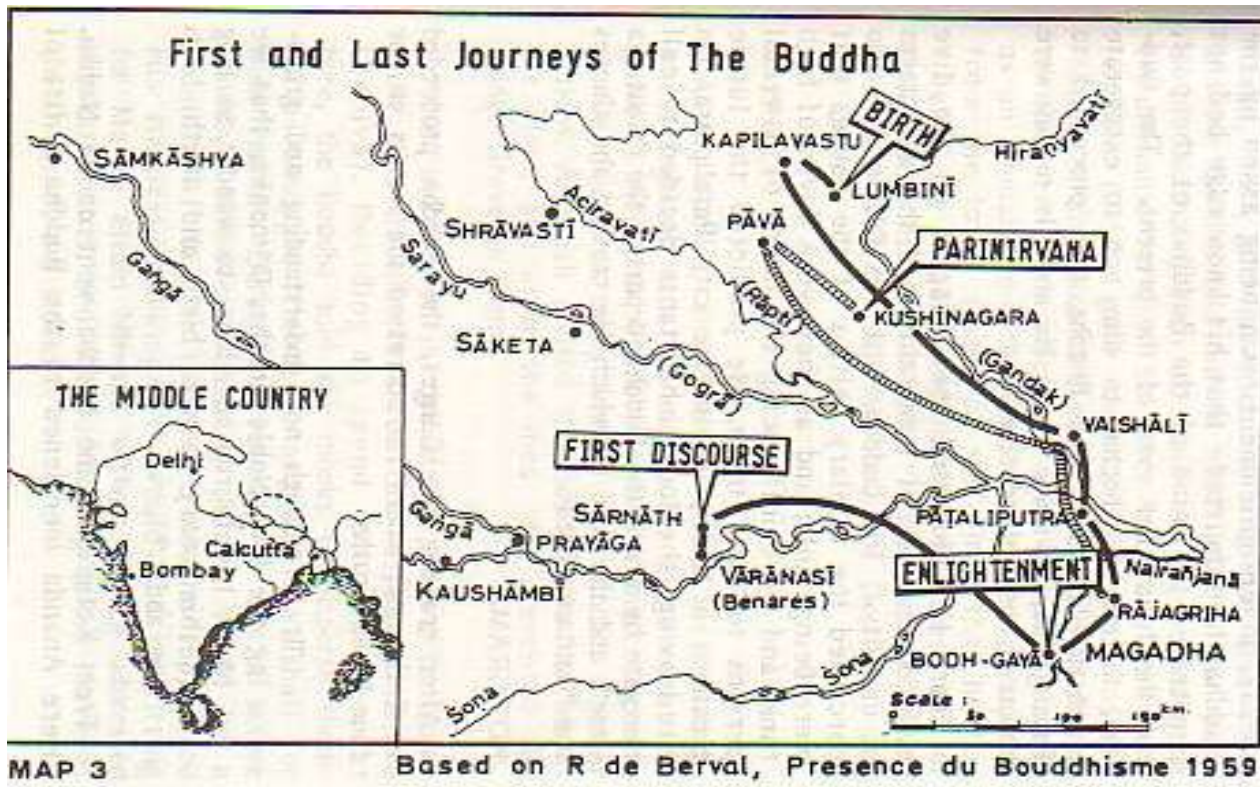
To further his military plans, Ajātasattu fortified Pāṭali, gāma and launched a series of ruthless and unscrupulous subversion of the enemy's strength before going into open war.⁴²² The Vajjīs were conquered after a protracted struggle, and a Magadhan minister controlled the recourses from Vesālī. The Mallas, too, were conquered in the same manner. After conquering Kosala and its dependencies including Kāśī, Magadha became the master of the central Ganges Plain. It was almost the richest, most populous and most technologically advanced area of India then.

Its control of prosperous and strongly fortified cities, trade routes, and navigation facilities, and its succession to the legacy of southern political and economic dominance from both Kāśī and Kosala, raised Magadha to paramount status in the mid-5th century BC. This achievement was due to the successful Magadhan practice of *Realpolitik*, to their relatively advanced political and military machinery, and to their keen appreciation of the nature of local political constraints. (Schwartzberg 1992:167)



Source: <http://www.aimwell.org/Photos/India/india.html>

⁴²² See eg Vassakāra's spy mission into Vajjī country and sabotage of the republic [1.1 n].



16.4 On the use of Sanskrit names

The notes of the translation sometimes uses Sanskrit names, sometimes given as Pali/Sanskrit. The Sanskrit names have been used in a previous essay and I have retained them partly to avoid the tedium of changing them into their Pali cognates, partly so that new readers will have some idea of Sanskrit names. Moreover, the Indian Buddhist terms that are found in modern dictionaries are all in their Sanskrit forms.